

LONDON SOCIETY.

MAY, 1898.

A Trial Trip.

By Capt. H. WILLING.

IN FOUR PARTS.

PART II.—CHAPTER V.—*continued.*

LET me read you her letter :

"My dear Gwendoline,—On my return to town I was surprised to hear you had sold your furniture and given up your house, though why any action of yours should surprise me I do not know—you were always wilful, and from the commencement I knew how your marriage must turn out. Your address even, I was unable to ascertain, and, therefore, send you this through that ridiculous old Irish-woman whom you encouraged to set up in Ebury Street as a lodging house keeper. Wherever you are, I would recommend you to join your husband at once; he has been seen at the sea-side (some low, out-of-the-way place), going about with a common class woman, and, I need hardly add, wasting money like water, so that if your object in leaving town was to economise, it certainly will not be attained. The creature he is with is of so bad a description that the police are after her for theft. Recently she attempted a burglary at the house of my maid's cousin, where she tried to secrete a clock on her person, and would then have been arrested had it not been for your husband, who impudently swore she was his wife, and saved her for that time."

Then the letter went on in twaddle and gossip about herself, till she finished as my "affectionate cousin, Ella Barton."

Now, of course I knew this vile letter was nothing but a tirade of nonsense. I knew that Jack had never spoken to anybody; I knew that I was the low woman, and the thief and all the rest of it, and yet, and yet so upset was I, that after a storm of tears, I turned round and fought with Jack, just as hard as ever I was able. I ac-

cused him of being the cause of it all—of having brought me to this place, of having made me look for lodgings, of having ruined me and declassed me. I said everything that could wound and offend him, and finally succeeded in making him as angry as myself.

Oh! what a wretched time we had of it after that.

Never have a row unless you have plenty of money; it's a luxury intended only for the rich, who can dignifiedly go their separate ways; or for the very poor who can throw pokers and plates, or jump on each other,—but for us, with only those two horrid little rooms, and one of us obliged to ring the bell every time we had done feeding, it was true wretchedness.

And of course Jack had the best of it, with his eternal walks.

One day I was on the Green, and I saw a most funny little wooden house being erected on the slope to the beach. It really was very pretty, built on wheels, so that it could be moved anywhere. It was in sections, each room being a section, ornamented outside with rough wood-work, and very nicely decorated inside, all lined with zinc to keep out damp, etc. There was a jolly little hall and four rooms. I eagerly asked for details, and the men told me it was for sale, and the price was one hundred and fifty pounds all complete.

Here was an idea—to live in a nice little cottage, in a nice field, a garden, trees, and a view of the sea in the distance! That I had not a hundred and fifty pounds to buy the house, and did not know exactly where to put my hand on the picturesque field, mattered nothing.

I flew to Jack, beaming. He was in, and lunch was on the table—cold mutton, which he hated. He looked as good-humoured as a thunder cloud.

"Oh! Jack, I've seen the very thing for us!" I cried, tossing my sailor hat on the top of the shrouded harp, which it neatly caught.

"Indeed!" with gloomy severity, helping himself to watery, mashed potatoes.

"Oh, don't go on rowing; I'm so tired of it."

"I like that," returned Jack. "I should like to know who began it."

"Oh! I began it, and I am sorry—and make it up. I want to talk," caving in completely; and pushing away my plate, I gave him a glowing description of my new ideas.

"Well, we will go and look at it, Dickie," Jack says.

He has not called me that name for nearly a week, and I think he is as glad as I am to make it up. Dear little wooden house, how useful you were! I thought it quite worth while having a fight; the making up was so pleasant, but Jack said "no, we'd been too long married." I did not like that, but I said nothing. No man can quite understand a woman—perhaps it's as well.

CHAPTER VI.

I WROTE to my cousin a brief, sarcastic, and, I considered, clever answer to her letter, but you need not see it, in case you would not share my opinion.

Jack was very nice after that, and we haunted together the builders of the little wooden house; we also drove with the Land Company's agent, and examined more or less damp and dreary "lots," and Jack smoked and was silent, and I talked to the land agent, and was "almost persuaded," and Jack would say to me in the evening, "Nice field, oh, very! How about water?" or, "That would do very well, but where would the drainage go?" and so on and so forth—tiresome, unanswerable, practical questions. And it seemed to me that little wooden house was wheeling away.

One day, strolling along the street I now knew so well, I saw in a stationer's shop window, displayed in the pages of the *Empress*, the well-known ladies' paper, the long, beautiful, and impossible figures of the smart women, who attend Her Majesty's drawing-room. As it is impossible to recognise one's friends from these fancy pictures, I bought the paper and took it—shall I say "home?" After enjoying myself thoroughly over a beautiful "debutante," train of white satin, trimmed with water-lilies, and another gown with Malmaison carnations, I turned to the "Travel Editor's Advice." Amongst other things, came "Barneville-sur-Mer is a place rising daily in favour. The sands and climate are charming, and to anyone in search of economy and simple pleasures, it is highly to be recommended. Good provisions can be obtained from Carteret, an inland market town two miles distant. Small furnished houses for the whole season can be had, facing the sea, from two hundred francs."

The wooden house became a motor car, and travelled into space.

Here was what I was really in search of, though five minutes before I was not aware of it—"simple pleasures"—an excellent climate, "sands" and a house for eight pounds sterling, for six whole months. I felt as if I had come into a fortune. Would Jack never come in? I tried to get rid of my superfluous energy by packing up all my hats, forgetting even to leave one out to travel in. At last the "giant feet are on the stair," and Jack comes breezily in.

"What are you at?" gazing at the wild confusion with which I had surrounded myself.

"Oh, Jack! this time I have an idea, which is not mine, so it must be sensible," rising, and shaking myself free of a coarse straw hat, that rolls—roses, thorns, and all—and finds a dusty refuge under the bed.

"Well! it's not a coherent one, at all events," said Jack.

"Well, it's just splendid!" handing him the *Empress*, and pointing to the tempting paragraph.

"I think we ought to write about it," remarks Jack, after he had pondered for what seemed to me an eternity. "It won't do for us to go off on a wild-geese chase."

"But it's all written down quite clearly—everything—even the price. How can it be a wild-geese chase, in such a good paper, too."

"Well, I don't know; you never can tell from a newspaper," says Jack. At which remark I jibe horribly, and tea, which just then comes in, is partaken of in silence—my possibly too vivid imagination, changing flabby toast and thick bread and butter into the "eclairs and tartines," provided by Champs Elysées Anglo-mania for the five o'clock. Still in dignified displeasure, I retire to the further packing of my hat case; the undusted straw hat—rescued, by much groping on my knees—at the top of the box; my travelling toque at the bottom, (as I afterwards found), I strive to make it lock, without getting red in the face—nothing detracts from calm, severe dignity like a red face.

"Here, I'll do that," Jack says, looking through the folding doors. "But is not all this a little premature? It's not," he continued, earnestly, "that I don't want to go; God knows any life would be better than loafing about here!"

He says it so sorrowfully, I feel obliged to give an affectionate hug to the blue serge leg nearest me, for he has advanced into the

room, and is standing over me as I kneel by my box. It is so seldom Jack shows any feeling, that I often forget things are really harder for him than for me. My poor old boy! I am afraid I am very selfish.

Then we go into ways and means, and I write off to the "Travel Editor" of the *Empress*.

"I hope he will be a 'woman,'" I say; "women are so much sharper and kinder, they don't mind trouble."

"Anyone can tell this woman's nationality," retorts Jack. "I think I'll write to Cook about the tickets. Oh, no! we shan't be personally conducted!" seeing an expression of dismay coming over my face.

Well, we write to Cook, we find out how to go—by Cherbourg. We do not get any answer from the editor; and I am wild to start.

"Let us now make our accounts," said Jack, with a deep sigh.

This is a specimen of the second week's expenses; I will not trouble you with the last, as it was pretty much the same.

Second week.

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|---------|----|----|
| Apartments | ... | ... | ... | £1 | 5 | 0 |
| Fire in sitting room | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Kitchen fire | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Gas | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Cruets | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 2 | 6 |
| Washing of linen | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Condiments | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| Butcher | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 12 | 8½ |
| Baker | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 3 | 6½ |
| Fishmonger | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 9 | 11 |
| Grocer | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 18 | 0 |
| Milk, two weeks... | ... | ... | ... | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| | | | | <hr/> | | |
| | | | | £4 13 2 | | |

"You see, strive as we may," said Jack, "it's impossible."

"Oh!" waving my hand lightly and vaguely around; "over there we will live for next to nothing."

"I am glad to hear it," said Jack.

"Let us go! Let us go!" was the answer he got.

And we went.

CHAPTER VII.

By Cherbourg—it's the way our Queen goes abroad; but if she had to go in the wretched screw boat we crossed in, she never would travel that way again. Let me draw a kindly veil over the dissipated and untidy-looking object, who was first of all shouted at for keys by a rough man, and then pinched and mauled all over by a fat old woman, who apparently considered English women are padded with tea; and lastly borne away from numerous other rivals, all shrieking the names of their hotels, in deafening chorus, by the triumphant conductor of the "Hôtel de Londres" bus, Jack still standing in the midst of our luggage, and more than suspected of smuggling cigars and matches. It's the very worst Douane I have passed through, not excepting the Spanish frontier Irun. When at last Jack did appear, and had given vent to his feelings in several big, big D's, he decided we had better remain where we were for that day, and having once more restored myself as well as I could with a hasty wash, and no tea, we went downstairs, where they gave us a very good *déjeuner*. We found plenty to interest us in the quaint old town, with its tall, ugly French houses, that blink in the sun like a sleepy white cat, the arsenal, and the fiercely-moustached little officers, who pervade the whole place, and for swagger could even give a lesson to life-guardsmen, dear to Hyde Park nursemaids.

We started next day to the sound of a horn, in a squeaky little train right through fair Normandy, and very fair, sunny and prosperous it looked, with the rich green of its fields, and tender blossom of its innumerable apple trees, the sun shining on the little fair-haired children, who looked so English, and who hearing them talk in their own *patois*, gave one a start of surprise.

We had plenty of time for seeing and hearing, as the train stopped at every little station. It was not, however, quite so slow as a train in which I travelled from Arcachon to Biarritz. The train stopped that day at a pretty little station, from whence I could catch a glimpse in the far distance of a tall church spire, the bell of which was ringing merrily. Everybody seemed to make an exodus there—engine-driver, guard, and all, and I was left in solitary state in my first-class carriage. After about half an hour I tried to get out, finding my position rather monotonous, but I was locked in. A short time afterwards, however, I saw, to my great relief, the whole

of the voyagers returning in procession; the guard heading the company, and leading a blushing maiden, *en toilette de nocce*, white gloves, veil and all.

"Why have we made this long stoppage?" I demanded, indignantly, through my window.

"Oh! but madame," the bridegroom expostulated, hurrying up to me, "this is a train of *petit vitesse*; and having to marry myself, I do not think I have been long;" with which explanation he left me.

"Good," said Jack, as I related this anecdote to him. "And was it not also on some French line we were travelling together, when the train slowed up at nowhere, and all the passengers and officials jumped out, and went off mushroom picking in the fields?"

"No, it was not in France, but in Spain," I answer; "but I don't quite remember where. They are nearly as bad in the Ardennes," continuing my recollections. "But it's more the stations there, that are conducted in such a peculiar manner. You remember when we wanted to go from Remouchons to Vielsam, we found the station locked up, and an old man, who was digging outside, calmly informed us that the stationmaster had gone out fishing!"

"I know," adds Jack; "and we climbed the paling, and when the down train arrived, and we explained the situation to the guard, his only comment was: 'He has an *excelled day*; I daresay he will come back with a basket full.'"

And so Jack and I chatted on, and though we were second class in a slow train, I enjoyed the journey greatly. Then "La Hai du Puis," shouted the porter, at least he meant it for "La Hai du Puis," but of course, being a porter, he shouted something quite different. And the door (though silver tipped) was widely opened to admit a young person, superb in attire of provincial smartness, and several bandboxes.

"Your fault, your fault; if we had come first, we should not have had this infiction," telegraphed Jack's indignant eyebrows. But I take no notice, for I am already dissecting Mademoiselle, and wondering if I should class her with the Westbourne Grove young woman, or the shopping lady from the suburbs, for in England we no longer have the country dressmaker, dear to the heart of the old-fashioned novelist. The up-to-date person of to-day, who presides over country *modes*, goes to Bond Street twice a month, and has her

annual trip to Paris. These profound thoughts are agitating my brain, when their primary cause suddenly addressed me in English.

"Madame is going to Jersey? There is no 'board' running yet, Madame."

"No," I replied; "we are going to Barneville-sur-mer."

"Ah! mon Dieu! how dull Madame will find it, and Monsieur also," turning a rather fine pair of eyes in Jack's direction.

"Oh, no!" I interpose hastily; I could not bear that anyone should say a word against my promised "El Dorado." "We are very fond of the sea, and the sands there are superb."

"But, Madame," said the girl, with a puzzled expression, "there are no sands at Barneville, the plage is quite two miles distant. If Monsieur will give to himself the trouble to look out of the window, he will see Barneville on that slope, far away from the sea, and there are no houses to be let there."

Oh, that newspaper man! It was well for him that he was not in the carriage! But the little milliner took it all in.

"If Madame would come on to Carteret, there is a fine plage there, and the sea washes herself on the balcony of the hotel."

"Oh, do let us go on, Jack! the other place is a regular 'do.'"

"Very well," answers Jack, resignedly, "we will probably get somewhere to-night."

"Oh, Monsieur, in five minutes from Barneville; I will explain to the guard about the luggage. N'est ce pas, Madame?"

She reminded me of the fatherly waiter at Southend. We could see for ourselves that Barneville was not a seaside place. Afterwards, we heard an enterprising company were making a long road from it to the sea, where they purposed selling "plots" for building. The *Empress* editor was evidently indulging in prophecy.

As we journeyed on to Carteret, the French girl explained that we must go to the "Hôtel des Anglais," the large "Hôtel de France" not yet being opened for the season. She also confided to me that *mon père* was a builder, and had two *châlets* to let, which Jack vulgarly said "accounted for the milk in the cocoanut." We talked in a mixture of French and English, Jack presently complimenting the *demoiselle* on her powers.

"You confabulate me, Monsieur," she replied, with becoming modesty. After that Jack subsided.

At last we arrive at Carteret, and after assuring us her father would

wait on us in the morning, Mademoiselle hands us over to a very small boy, who taking possession of my very large baskets, directs us to go down the street and we will see the hotel. We discovered it in a half-built state—indeed, that is the chief characteristic of Carteret. Having entered through a long kitchen, crowded with men, the landlady, a stout peasant, took me across the courtyard into a building facing the sea. It was clean, bare, whitewashed, and very cold.

After some haggling, she agreed to take us at five francs a day each, though she added, rather acidly, "she would just as soon be without visitors, at this time of the year."

"Nice and French," remarked Jack, dragging the drapery back from the bed I told him he might occupy, while I looked sadly out of the window on a wild, wet plain of grey sand, topped here and there with rush grass. The sea had washed the balcony below us, and retired, leaving dirty, muddy trails behind. The sun was gone, the sky was dull, and the wind blew cold; I shivered and shut the window.

"Come, let us get a wash," said Jack, recovering his good humour (he never was bad tempered for long), and having done so, though under difficulties, he came down to dinner, looking just as if he were going to dine in dear old Green Street.

The room in which dinner was laid was sufficiently large to seat a hundred people, a long narrow table and chairs being its only furniture, at one end of which our "covers" were laid, while at the other stood the larder, which Jack examined, and reported to me as containing chickens, lobsters, and beef, so though we might be frozen, we would not be starved, and though I grumbled at the sand on the floor that got into my shoes, and through my open-work stockings, and the draught that came from windows and doors that never would keep shut, we enjoyed the well cooked food, and did justice to the "omelette au rhum" that finished our repast. Jack drank nearly a magnum of Normandy cider.

Thoroughly tired, I went upstairs, carefully shading the rickety candle from the winds that blew, and placing it on the chest of drawers, peered across into the tall glass opposite me. I could not see much, but what I did gave me a shock:—untidy hair, soiled blouse, altogether a crumpled appearance; this should never be again, I would imitate Jack. I would never let myself go; even if it

was to put on the simplest tea gown in the world, I would dress for dinner. With which excellent resolution I went to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE sun was flooding the room next morning, as I woke with a start, caused by the very vigorous thump administered to the door, followed, without waiting permission to enter, by a tall and stout young woman, carrying a huge tray. She placed it on a small table, where its remaining was purely a matter of balance. She wished us respectively the cheeriest of *bonjours*, then quietly taking a chair and seating herself, she seized the household loaf she had brought up—about a yard and a half long—and flourishing a knife that would just suit an executioner who wished to decapitate a very thick-throated man, proceeded to cut a pile of slices of bread; this she divided evenly, as also a large lump of golden-looking butter, then rising to her full height—not a mean one—she lifted coffee pot, and boiling milk jug on a level with her shoulder, and dexterously proceeded to pour both at the same moment into two large earthenware cups or bowls, as she called them. She then brought us each our breakfast—helping Jack first. In reply to my question she informed me that her name was Artemisia, that she was eighteen, that the cap on her head was as nothing in beauty to the one she wore to mass on Sunday, that she was affianced to a waiter who was at present following his vocation in Jersey, but that the postman was a *belle homme* and amiable to her, and that she did not quite know with whom she would range herself; “Pardon, Madame, but the room was quite large, it was Monsieur’s bath that was beyond.” That was *trop fort* altogether.

“You had better go and get some water to fill it,” Jack shouted from his side of the room.

“But certainly, only would not Monsieur take more coffee or bread before she went, or Madame?”

“What a dreadful chatter-box,” said Jack, when at last she went off.

“But she is rather amusing,” I say.

“In England you’d say she was vastly impertinent.”

“Oh! but it’s so different, is it not?”

"Well, the coffee was very good," admits Jack. "You will see the job we shall have to get enough water." And we had. Artemisia would do anything for us, but that. If we could have tubbed in cider, I am sure she would have rolled in a barrel of it—but water! What could we require so much of it for? We did not look dirty, either of us; she would say that for us, though we were English—and Monsieur, he went into the great sea, and Madame intended going, and they yet said the sea could not wash them! Well, it was a mystery not to be explained.

As soon as Jack was ready, he went off on an exploring expedition, and I betook myself to the famous balcony, but the sea was very far from washing it, and the smell from the sand was suggestive of Venice. Jack came in hot and dusty.

"Well, I must say I think it a confounded hole," he said, looking thoroughly done up. "I walked for miles along a dusty road, sand everywhere, under my feet, in the air, blinding me, and alongside of me in great hills, that shut out all view, nothing but pure loose sand, without a particle of vegetation, looking like huge glaciers."

"Without the climbing girls, the ropes, and the guides," I put in irreverently.

"A burning sun, a beastly East wind," goes on Jack, detailing his grievances, "not a soul who could understand when I asked the way in French, and always answered in their muttering patois."

"Which you could not understand."

"Oh! bother! I must have a drink. Bring me," as Artemisia appeared, in answer to the hand bell that he violently rang—"oh! of course they won't have any whiskey—some cider please."

"I am afraid Jack this place is a 'do' too," I say ruefully, after my better half has assuaged his thirst.

"No doubt the cider is the best thing in it," says Jack.

"How would it be"—this in a very small insinuating voice—"how would it be, if we went to St. Malo; Dinon and Dinard are nice, indeed I have heard," with more animation, "that Sarah Bernhardt is going to Dinard this summer."

"Anywhere the 'Great Sal' goes, will be expensive," says Jack, "but there is another place, Saint something or other."

"Saint Servent," I say promptly and delightedly. "Yes, Jack, that would be the very thing."

"You have an idea which is not your own, and therefore must be

good," says Jack sarcastically. But further sparring is interrupted by Artemisia, with her accustomed thump. "Monsieur l'entrepreneur (the builder) and the father of our yesterday's travelling acquaintance is shown in. With many bows, a common looking labouring man declares himself ready to show Monsieur, Madame, all the houses in Carteret best worth having; (that he has not the letting of the best houses I find out afterwards.) I declare myself ready to go with him, buttoning up my covert-coat, but Jack says "we have not had *déjeuner* yet."

"Oh! I don't care for that," I reply, "I delight in house hunting."

"You can just as well go after lunch," remarks Jack, "besides it's all included in the five francs," showing a Briton's wish to get his money's worth. But I won't stop, and go off with the little milliner's father. Two hours afterwards, I return, weary, and hot; the houses were horrid—the prices enormous, and the builder's manners to me, like those, to say the least of it, with which he would greet a long lost female friend. I ordered tea at once on my return—which was very bad—and not included in the *pension* price.

"I don't see how it's to be managed, Dickie," Jack says later on in the afternoon, as I lie on my bed, having no sofa. "I have been going over things, and I have made up the accounts; shall I show them to you?"

"Oh, dear! Jack," turning over lazily on my pillow, and trying to get my face out of the way of the big monogram embroidered all too emphatically on its big hard centre, "I do hate accounts; if we can't go, why you know all about it—and we must stay—but I do think this a horrid hole."

"We can't stay in this hotel," says Jack energetically, "even eight shillings a day is beyond us."

"I don't want to stay in the hotel," I say crossly and sleepily.

"How would it be if we went to Jersey?" Jack remarks thoughtfully, taking no notice of my bad temper. "I think we might manage to get over there, and live in cheap lodgings; after all England, or anything English, is always the cheapest."

"Oh! how can you! How can you! It would be that awful Southend over again, besides"—sitting up in bed, and abandoning my effort to get away from the monogram—"it's a clubby place, Jack, and there is a governor and a regiment, and there would be sure to be someone ——"

"Yes," assents Jack, "I am afraid there would be a great many 'someones.' Get up," he adds, changing his tone, "it's just dinner time; dinner and a sleep may improve the look of things."

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER all, we remained at Carteret, and as it grew on us we found it not half a bad place.

"Now I will show you the accounts," said Jack—"I mean what it has cost us coming from Southend."

| | £ | s. | d. |
|---|-----|-----|---------------|
| Porter from lodgings to South-Western station | ... | ... | 0 2 6 |
| Train to Liverpool Street | ... | ... | 0 10 0 |
| Cab to Waterloo... | ... | ... | 0 4 0 |
| Train and boat to Cherbourg | ... | ... | 3 10 0 |
| Lunch in London | ... | ... | 0 4 6 |
| Dinner, Southampton | ... | ... | 0 10 0 |
| Excess luggage | ... | ... | 1 5 0 |
| Porters, etc. | ... | ... | 0 5 0 |
| Hôtel de Londres, 40 fcs. | ... | ... | 1 13 4 |
| Train to Barneville, omnibus, etc., 25 fcs. | ... | ... | 1 0 0 |
| | | | <u>£9 4 4</u> |

After much house-hunting, we succeeded in getting a nice little cottage for eight pounds for six months, though I need hardly say we did not take it from my milliner's father. It was a sort of place you would not possibly find in England. It stood with another (it was only semi-detached, I regret to say) in a high walled garden, with a gate in the middle. No one could see into the garden, which was pretty and private, but we could see over the wall, and watch all that was to be seen. The sea to the right of us, and the Jersey boats going and coming; the ugly, unfinished "Hôtel des Anglais" to the left a tree, and a summer-house with an enormous, hideous silver ball on the top of it. The cottage contained but two rooms, but they were large, airy, and many-windowed. I was perfectly happy for nearly a fortnight, disposing my "properties" about with-

out fear of landladies. I had a huge screen made for me by the village carpenter, which I covered with lattice-work and trails of ivy to hide the kitchen fire-place. The wood-work only cost me five francs. I painted it: the smell was disagreeable, but what of that?—the effect was charming.

Really, by the time my cottage walls were covered with photos, fans, plates, etc., and several old boxes converted into lounges, arches, and windows artistically draped, my cottage was a picture. Still, even in Eden there are always drawbacks. I never heard that they cooked in that favoured garden, but we had to. Jack had theories, I had none—I told you I was useless.

First of all we tried a servant by the hour; she made an awful fire of wood and charcoal, and drove us out of the place with smoke and smell. There was method in her madness, for when we finally came in, and sat down to eat the shoulder of lamb she had cooked, we found the meat pared off nearly to the bone. After luncheon, she gave me notice, saying we had no conveniences in that house, but that she could recommend a chalet. Certainly had she remained with us, we should have had still fewer, as over the cooking of that joint, she burnt a saucepan, broke two plates and a dish.

After that Jack had a try, but in a very short time we came to the conclusion that a fire without a grate or a kitchener was not to be endured. We went to Barneville, and procured two spirit lamps; with these Jack evolved wonderful things in the way of omelets, savoury eggs, and once or twice, some fried cutlets; he also made our morning coffee, and very well he did it.

But man—especially six-foot man—cannot live on eggs alone. The cutlets were a failure; and we made up our minds to dine every evening at the "*Hôtel de France*," the large hotel, which had now opened. The manager, a cheery little Niceois, came to a very reasonable arrangement with us—two francs per head; so every evening we repaired there to dinner.

I liked this arrangement, it made a pleasant break, and gave me an excuse for putting on my pretty gowns. The hotel was very empty, but there were always people going and coming from Jersey.

There were, however, two English people who remained there the whole season. They were not a couple, so I cannot describe them as that; nor were they brother and sister. The situation to me was a novel one. He was a tall young man, apparently not

very strong, of about thirty. She was an ugly young woman, perhaps not quite as old, and was described as Miss Downer, his lady "companion." I believe it was quite all right, but it seemed funny. Every evening, no matter what the weather was—rain, hail, thunder, lightning, or bitter wind—we had short samples of all these—it never prevented them going for a two hours' walk over the wild sand "Dunes," to the point where the lighthouse stands high above jagged rocks, by far the wildest and most picturesque bit of scenery at Carteret.

Sometimes Jack and I would follow them, just for the lark of seeing what they did, for they always carried two books, though it was dusk, but they ever melted away in the "Dunes" before we could catch them.

I met other wonderful people passing to and from the Channel Isles at that early season. Notably, the editor of the "Petit something" and his wife; they were returning from Jersey, where they had spent three weeks.

"Madame," he remarked to me one evening at table d'hôte, "I am a careful man, and know what it is to travel in England (he had never been there in his life). Of course, the editor of such a paper as mine is a marked man. What do I do? I throw off concealment—I have my *own* photograph, with my *own* signature, attached to my *own* passport (by this time he was screaming). Another might say, 'I will examine these English, sllly; I will worm myself into their secrets, then I will publish to all Paris what I have found out.' But I say, *No*; the Englishman is a fool, but not such a fool as he looks. Even their police would discover who *I* am—and so myself to everyone I proclaim the fact most openly. And what do I meet with in return?—courtesy, amiability, I may say homage." Here he dropped his voice and raised his eyes upwards, as if he were trying to catch a glimpse of his own statue—he was an exceedingly short, fat man. "And the ladies, Madame,"—again he stopped a moment, and neatly drawing the whole of the round of a cutlet into his mouth, became for a second or two unintelligible; when I next understood him, he was saying, "at their English breakfast, so well combed, so tight-laced, smelling so delightfully of scented soap!" Here he mercifully paused, and sniffed vigorously at a garlic-seasoned entrée at that moment offered to him. His wife looked across him at me, her well smudged eyes betokening a

certain amount of amusement. She was a fine woman, tall for a foreigner, and, of course, a little too stout—I daresay she had been pretty in the days of her youth. She wore a pink accordianed front and a complexion to match, in memory of that sweet time; she had on nine diamond brooches—I counted them—and as many rings as she could cram on her fat, white fingers. To hear her breathe, gave me the idea that she could not be far behind the English ladies admired by her husband—in the matter of tight-lacing.

Her opinion of Jersey differed radically from his—she said the “Grand Hotel” was comfortable with the comfort of the English, which I think she considered to consist chiefly in carpets, but that there was no “plage,” very little music, and that Sunday!—but her feelings overcame her on that point. She also confided to me that she had changed her apartment in Paris, from the Champs Elysées to the Boulevard Montmartre, for the sake of having more “life” round her. After that, it was no wonder she found Jersey dull. I asked how she would like to stay at Carteret. “Madame,” she replied, in tones so tragic that her voice resembled an amateur reciting Hamlet’s ghost, “It would kill me in a week.”

The next morning I happened to witness their departure. Monsieur was brandishing the passport and photograph in the face of “le canaille,” as he was pleased to designate the very mild and stupid Carteret station-master. Madame was almost agitated in her affectionate farewell, and too prodigal admiration of my last year’s frock. She had on all the brooches, and her grey and much-flounced jacket, finished with short, puffed sleeves, her fat arms being covered with long gloves and innumerable bangles, principally diamond—sham or otherwise;—she had also an extra coating of “crème Simon” on her face—possibly as a protection against dust.

“Good-bye, editor of the ‘Petit something,’” I say, waving my hand after their second-class carriage. “You pass as ships in the night,” pensively thinking of that lovely story.

“I always knew you had a fine imagination,” remarks Jack, “but to get up a sentimentality about that howling idiot and his painted wife, is more than I even gave you credit for.”

CHAPTER X.

I GREW very strong in Carteret, for the air was fine and bracing, though the wind was nearly always in the east. I used to accompany Jack in his long walks sometimes, and made acquaintance with the oddest old people in the farmhouses that nestled amongst the surrounding hills. We used to come back laden with delicious butter and eggs. One old Norman farmeress, who was my particular friend (they told us in Carteret she was excessively rich), became quite fond of me, and used to prepare a little feast for my coming, dressing herself in her best—and her best was very pretty, her high Norman cap with its exquisite Valenciennes lace, her snowy handkerchief and delightful “sabots,” showing what Jack termed “a clean pair of ankles.” She had never been beyond Barneville in her life (about three miles distant from her homestead), but her “man,” she told me, with pride, had been to Jersey. I would sit in the great, bare, stone kitchen for hours at a time, watching her shelling great mountains of peas, or cooking the dinner for her “man” and the farm labourers. She mostly fed them on bacon and cabbage with potatoes; she cooked all together, with an amazing quantity of butter, in an enormous black pan on the open fire, sitting on her little stool inside the great fireplace, turning and twisting the mixture with her big, long wooden spoon. I never could make up my mind whether, as she sat there with the fire flames lighting up her wrinkled face, she looked most like the wicked old witch or the benevolent fairy godmother dear to the heart of childhood. She was never tired of hearing of all the wonders of her own country, of Paris, its shops, theatres, lights, and all the glories that were a sealed book to her. A life without cows to tend, labourers to cook for, butter to make, eggs to gather, and pigs to feed, seemed to her impossible. “Then what do they do, these Paris ladies,” she used to say to me, “just dress up and drive and spend money, without any coming in? I should not like that!”

“I shall take you to Paris,” I answer, gaily. “You shall fill one of those fine, long, knitted stockings of yours with gold pieces, or bank notes, if you prefer it. We will go to the Continental, and I’ll dress you up from Worth and Pingat, and we will drive into the Bois, and you shall dine at the *table d’hôte*,” and then I would go into fits of laughter over the picture my fancy painted me.

But, unfortunately, I saw other sides of the Norman character, and that nearer home. Mademoiselle Marie Eustache, who condescended to act as our housemaid and water-carrier (all water had to be brought from the village well), at the rate of ten centimes per hour, was a thief. I must say I was well warned of it, for a village deputation called and informed me of the fact. But with the perverseness of human nature, I would not listen. "Oh, let us give her a chance, Jack; she is so nice-looking, and she knows how to do my hair."

"Of course if she knows how to do your hair, that settles it," Jack said, and smoked.

I told Marie what they said of her, to which she replied, "They say things of you." And like the coward I was, I did not ask her what. It was really wonderful the way she managed to take things, for though I kept a sharp watch over her, still, slowly but surely, things daily went.

I have mentioned our many windows. Two at the back of the room looked upon the "Place," where, amidst tall trees, stood the thatched cottage where Marie lived. Her brother, a little rascal of twelve, always played under our windows during the time of her service. Her *modus operandi* was to throw anything and everything she could get hold of out of the window to him. She had a peculiar liking for black gowns—indeed, funerals were the chief relaxation of the Carteret villagers—and I heard that she appeared at one of these functions in a black silk gown of mine, blazing in jet and black lace. Now, how she got that dress and bodice out of the window without my seeing her, considering I never left her for a moment, will always be a mystery. Anybody else would have dismissed her, but I did not, her very naughtiness amused me. Jack said it was because she could dress hair. I was always glad when she had done her work, and I could lock up the house and go out, leaving the key at the grocer's, in case Jack should return before me.

The Lady Journalist.

By D. D.

THE enormous increase of periodical literature which the last decade of the century has brought with it has opened an immense field of occupation for women. That "dread being," the lady novelist, has been with us for several generations, but that still more "dread being," the lady journalist, is of more recent creation.

The numerous penny magazines, and the increasing number of ladies' papers, have given her plenty of work of a remunerative nature. Indeed a lady journalist in full work can make a better income than a novelist, unless the latter is in the front rank. Sometimes lady-novelists supplement their work by doing a little journalism anonymously, or under another *nom-de-guerre*.

Journalism of the kind here referred to is a rest from imaginative work; it is far less fatiguing mentally than novel-writing, it does not require much mental exertion, nor does it tell on the nervous system in the same exhausting way that novel-writing does. Much of it is purely mechanical, and it requires no special talent; any woman of average intelligence can learn it, and there is now a school of journalism to teach it.

Attention to detail has always been a specially feminine characteristic, and a glance at some of the penny magazines or "ladies'" papers, in which the lady journalist instructs her readers how to do everything, from being presented at court to taking iron-mould spots out of linen, will suffice to show that details are not forgotten by the new factor in current literature. The amount of ignorance prevalent among the reading public of the commonest subjects of everyday life is enormous, judging from the instructions which make up the greater part of these papers. We have seen long paragraphs on how to sew on a button, and a whole article on darning stockings, and this in days when plain sewing is well taught even in board schools, and manuals of every kind of needle-work can be bought for a few pence. The lady journalist is nothing if not practical; she instructs her readers how to make their hats and gowns, tells them what is worn, and where to buy the materials; tells them

what to have for dinner, and how to cook it; gives them a *menu* for every meal for every day in the week, with instructions how to prepare them; and even tells them how to give a garden-party in a London back-yard, or how to give an "at home" in a little jerry-built suburban house or in a tiny flat.

She is an authority on etiquette, and writes short articles on how to behave in a ball-room, and answers anxious enquiries frequently emanating from her own brain, asked for the sake of answering, as to the commonest acts of daily life, such as leaving cards, wearing or not wearing gloves, returning visits, and various other similar trivial matters, which most people learn unconsciously. She is artistic as well as practical, and gives advice on house-decoration and furnishing, and writes articles on a modern place of torture, called a "cosy corner," in which art-muslin and pongee-silk play a conspicuous part, and teasles and bulrushes in a painted drain-pipe, offer themselves as subjects of contemplation.

She is also ethical, and gives advice to mothers on the training of their children in one column, to mistresses on the management of servants in another, to girls on courtship and marriage in another, and to wives on their duties to their husbands in yet another.

Want of reticence, that leading characteristic of the times we live in, is one of her failings and subjects that are more appropriate to the dressing-room, are openly discussed by her.

The modern love of luxury and the striving of every class to imitate the one just above it is her chief *raison-d'être*. That the ignorance alluded to above really prevails, and the desire for its enlightenment exists somewhere, is shown by the large number of papers which afford it; there is evidently a large public which demands what the lady journalist supplies.

The doings of that complex machine, called "society," is another subject for the lady journalist's pen; descriptions of balls and garden-parties and the dresses worn at them, seem to possess enthralling interest for people who were not present.

From what has been said, it will be seen there is variety in the work of a lady journalist, indeed those who follow the profession seriously must be able to do real hard work. They must study the shop-windows to see what to avoid, and live with note-books in their hands to jot therein every item out of which "copy" can be made. They must learn how to interview all "sorts and conditions of

women," and ever be on the look out for some new occupation for them, for to suggest means of getting a living to others is no small part of the work the lady journalist must do to earn her own bread. Sometimes she has to take lessons in cookery, or laundry-work, or dairy-work, or manicurism or some other modern fad, before she can write articles about it; always she must lay in a stock of cheap manuals on every subject likely to be interesting to her public, and dress the contents up into bright little paragraphs. Often it is terrible drudgery, but it is drudgery that is well paid on the whole, and it can be done at home, which may or may not be a recommendation in these days when homes are too often but hotels in which people sleep and eat, and live elsewhere.

Percy's Yarn.

By A. R. STEEDMAN.

Author of "A HEAVY STAKE," "HIS LAST DERBY," &c., &c.

ONE o'clock had just struck on Percy Gordon's mantelpiece clock. We had been telling yarns for the last hour or so, having got rather tired of playing—sad to confess, oh, ye fond parents—penny nap.

We were a small party of three devoted chums, engaged in studying for the well recognised medical degree of Edinburgh University. As the rooms we were in were those in which, for economy's sake, Percy Gordon had elected to dwell, it is clearly my duty to present him first before my readers.

To begin with, he was tall and strong, standing, as we had often measured, just five feet eleven inches in height. He could not be called stout, but his frame was strongly knit together, and his biceps were things to wonder at. Memory brings him back to me as on that night he lay back in a comfortable old easy chair, with his old dark smoking jacket with collar and cuffs of quilted crimson. I can recall his closely-cropped black hair, his keen, venturesome, dark eyes, his straight nose, his lips with always a half-amused curve upon them, and his finely moulded chin. Good old Percy, he has been lost from our sight and ken for so many years. I often pic-

ture him as one of Dr. Jamieson's heroes in that long, wild ride, and that lonely, hopeless fight.

John Kennedy was only of medium height, with fair, and somewhat freckled, face and sturdy body. No one but Percy could beat him with the gloves, and he also was the best of good fellows, and one, who like myself, would take a part in any wild escapade Percy chose to lead.

Percy's rooms were in Clerk Street, Edinburgh. We were all in our last year, and while Percy was twenty-three, we others were about a year his junior.

We had been telling yarns, I have said, and when the clock struck I was beginning to yawn, when Percy passed the whisky decanter, after helping himself in the old free-and-easy way, and quietly remarked, "Were you boys ever at Monte Carlo?"

"Shades of Croesus, no!" cried Kennedy. "When were you there?"

"Have patience, and I shall tell you the yarn. I haven't told it to a soul before, because the truth is, I made an infernal ass of myself. When the classes rose last summer I was very down in the mouth. Money matters were all wrong, and it looked as if I would have to spend the vacation in town. One never knows one's luck, however. I was lying yawning in bed one morning, wondering whether to get up or turn over for another hour. There was nothing to do; no money to go anywhere, and I was absolutely sick of strolling round the town with all my friends away. Just as I was making up my mind to sleep the other hour, my landlady came in with two letters, and gave them to me. 'Bills, I have not the slightest doubt,' I said to myself, as I threw them wearily on the dressing-table without getting up. It was noon when I again awoke, and I felt half glad to think the day was so far over. Getting up, I carelessly tore open one of the letters, and a piece of well-known blue paper fluttered to the floor—'Mr. Johnston's compliments, and he would beg to point out that the enclosed account is long overdue, &c., &c.' 'The other will likely be from Smith,' I thought to myself. How is it that when one is down in the mouth everyone seems to jump on you?"

The other envelope, however, contained a letter of some length, and imagine my feelings when I read that an old aunt of mine had died, leaving me a legacy of one hundred pounds. The letter con-

cluded by saying that on my returning the receipt which was enclosed, duly signed, a draft would be forwarded to me for the amount. The letter was from a well-known firm of London solicitors.

"Of course I felt sorry for the old lady, but when I tell you that I had never seen her, you will easily imagine that my feelings were not long sad ones. Here was an end to the worry of these tailors' bills, and here was the means of getting away from the too familiar beauties of 'Modern Athens.'

"Within an hour, that receipt was on its way to the London lawyers', and I was poring over time-tables. Of course the obvious thing to do when one has superfluous cash and plenty of leisure, is to go to London. From there one can go anywhere; but first, be it said to my credit, I determined to pay off all my debts, which I found would engulf twenty pounds of my new-found fortune. This left eighty pounds on hand. What can one not do with eighty pounds? How impatient I was to get that bank draft, and how joyfully I cashed it within an hour after receiving it! It did not take long to pay off Johnston, who, by the way, was mighty civil, and I caught the night mail for London with plenty to spare.

"The next morning, after a cold bath and breakfast at the 'Grand,' I sat down to fix on my ultimate destination. I think it must have been the exuberance of my spirits consequent on my lucky windfall that first brought Monte Carlo into my mind. Anyhow, the idea no sooner occurred to me than my mind was made up. My only regret was at not having you two fellows with me, for, instinctively, I knew that I was in for a lark. My knowledge of French is, as you know, of the scantiest, but I felt that that rather increased the lark than otherwise. I spent that day knocking about London, and left Victoria Station the following morning at nine o'clock, *en route* for the sunny south.

"I reached Monte Carlo in the afternoon of the following day and was quite enchanted with the place. So I strolled about, enjoying the sight of the crowds of people of all nationalities, till it was time for dinner. At that meal, I could not help smiling to myself at what all those swell folk would say, if they knew that the young fellow sitting at the same table with them was an Edinburgh medical student, with but fifty pounds in his pocket, and his return ticket.

"My next neighbour was a remarkably pretty girl, but she took no notice of me. She was evidently English, and was with a tall,

military-looking chap: he was a Frenchman, and not too good-looking a one at that. Somehow I sized him up as an adventurer straight away, but I never asked myself that if that were so, what was the English girl? The more I looked at her, the more I was fascinated, and it was not till she seemed to be aware of my attention, and by her disdainful look to resent it, that I turned my gaze elsewhere.

"That night I entered the Casino, and, determined not to play till I saw something of the game, strolled round the various tables. At one I saw some excitement going on, so making my way quickly to the spot, I stood behind a young fellow, who I soon learned from the talk was staking the maximum and losing every time. No matter what colour that chap played, it was no use, and still he went at it, as if every turn would change his luck. It didn't, however, for in a few moments he rose from his chair fairly cleared out. Before I knew what I was doing, I found myself sitting on the chair he had risen from, with my money staked, watching the game for all I was worth.

"I began quietly, not wishing to loose my little capital all at once. The fellow who had left had made his last stake on red, and black had won. Well, of course, any fool would have backed red the next time; and, of course, I did it. Equally, of course, I won. That was the beginning—and what a run of luck I had! When I left the table, thinking that I had done a good enough night's work, I had five hundred pounds in my pocket.

"The next day I did not go near the tables till evening. I may as well remark here, however, that at dinner that evening my pretty neighbour looked quite friendly. I put it down to the fact that it was the second time we had dined together, but did not attempt to address her. On taking my seat at the green cloth later, I was surprised to find her looking over my shoulder, watching my game. Of course that beastly Frenchman was with her. Well, I started winning again, but always with moderate stakes. I simply could not go wrong. Suddenly I heard an excited whisper at my back, 'Play the maximum!' I turned round, and recognising my pretty neighbour, replied, 'Oh, no, I'm not such a plunger as all that.' I quietly continued my game until I had won another five hundred pounds, then rose and offered Madame my seat. She declined, but, to my surprise, at once entered into an animated conversation with me.

"What a run of luck you have had! Why did you leave off playing?"

"To this I modestly replied, 'Sufficient unto the evening is the luck thereof.'

"I gathered that she had watched me playing the evening before, and then it struck me that that might account for her amiability at dinner that evening. Altogether, however, I was ass enough to feel flattered by her attention, and when she looked anxiously round and could not find her companion, why the least I could do was to offer to see her back to the hotel. My offer was at once accepted, and we left the building together. On the short stroll to the hotel, our friendship ripened wonderfully quickly. I was a little annoyed when I thought things over in my own room to remember that I had told her all about myself. My excuse was that I did not wish to pose to her as a man of fortune, and so gain her friendship by false pretences. Curiously enough, I did not think it strange that she had told me nothing about herself.

"The next morning, on coming down to breakfast, I found my friend of the preceding evening at the table, toying carelessly with the wing of a chicken.

"'Good morning, Mr. Gordon,' was her greeting, with a little smile of welcome. 'I am all alone for the day; my husband has gone off on business, which will detain him till to-morrow morning, at least. What shall I do with myself all day? How little resource we women have when left to ourselves!'

"'It will give me pleasure if I can be of use to you,' I said. 'I have no plans for the day as yet, so that if you will put up with my poor company, I shall be delighted.'

"'Ah! it is good of you,' she answered, laughingly. 'You *are* a conceited boy. What a favour you are bestowing on me. Why, don't you know that there are at least twenty men here—men of title and position—who would give anything for the pleasure of escorting me wherever I chose to go?'

"I quite believed this, though as yet she seemed to know no one in Monte Carlo, save her husband and myself; but, unquestionably, she was a beautiful woman. The half-bantering light in her eyes, however, pandered to my own conceit, and I flattered myself that, even against odds, I had made an impression on her. So I answered, fairly coolly, 'Am I then to understand that Madame prefers other com-

pany to-day? In that case, of course, I should not for a moment press my claims.'

"'Oh, now you are naughty, Mr. Gordon. You have lost your temper—and with a lady, fie! Still, I should not have teased you. Please forget what I said; it is not really true. I know no one here, and I should not care to go any distance alone. Will you take me a nice long drive? The weather is lovely.'

"Of course I went, and Madame Durville was absolutely delightful. When we got back, just in time to dress for dinner, there was a telegram for her. She tore it open, and after glancing at it handed it to me. It was from her husband, stating that he was succeeding admirably with the flotation of a mine, and that he could not be back for a day or two. Meanwhile, if she were lonely, she could return to Paris.

"'And are you lonely?' I could not resist saying, softly. For answer I got a soft look from her wonderful brown eyes.

"'Do you wish me to go?' she said.

"'You will not go,' I answered, my passion getting beyond mere prudence.

"'No, I suppose not,' she replied, dreamily.

"'You are mine,' I said, hotly.

"'On the contrary, you are mine, monsieur, *pour passer le temps*,' she said, archly. 'Oh, you mustn't, at least—not yet, for we hardly know each other,' she said, gently, with an air of virgin reproach, as I crushed her in my arms.

"We dined that night *tête à tête*, and her vivacity was charming. 'One feels so free,' she almost whispered, and so low that I doubted whether the words were really uttered. After dinner we adjourned together to the tables, and again my luck was marvellous.

"'Why don't you play the maximum?' she cried. 'You would have won a fortune by this time with such luck.'

"'I am doing quite well enough,' I said. 'I have already made what is to me a fortune.'

"Leaning over my shoulder, she placed the maximum on red with the gold lying in front of me.

"'Red it is!' I half shouted in my relief at not seeing my money swept away. I kept on playing, sometimes with one stake, sometimes with another, till growing tired of the excitement, I rose and left the tables. On getting back to the hotel, Madame insisted on

my accompanying her to her sitting-room to count my spoil. That night I had won over one thousand pounds.

"'Really such luck cannot continue,' I remarked.

"'You will not surely give in already?' she said.

"'Yes, I believe I will,' I answered. 'I am tired of the green cloth, of the frequenters of the tables, of everything. Were it not for you I should leave the whole thing, and go to Ostend and finish my holiday there.'

"'That would be delightful. I should like to go there too. I cannot stay here by myself, and it would be still much handier for my husband to join me there. The only thing is the expense of moving, as my pocket-money is almost exhausted.'

"'But I am rich now,' I said. 'Will you not give me the privilege of a friend and let me be your escort?'

"'You mean pay my expenses? My dear boy, don't you know that my husband is twenty times wealthier than you with your silly two thousand pounds?'

"Of course I felt humiliated. She made me feel such a bounder, and I suppose I must have revealed my thoughts by my disconsolate looks.

"'Never mind, don't be so down-hearted; we will go together, but if I tell my husband of your offer, how he will laugh.'

"I blushed crimson. The idea of being laughed at—and with reason, too—by that bilious-looking Frenchman, was too much for me.

"'You will not tell him?' I said. 'Promise me, or I shall go off straight home to Scotland.'

"'Very well then, I won't, but you must never suggest such a thing to me again, or I shall, indeed, be angry.'

"The night ended in a short moonlight walk, during which she told me wonderful stories of Ostend, and of the good time we would have there.

"'Perhaps my husband will not join me for a day or two. Shall you be glad?' she whispered.

"'You know that I will,' I answered, eagerly. Her head was leaning towards mine for my answer. I reached down and kissed her for the second time. She drew away from me, covered with confusion, then bending swiftly forward, kissed me full on the mouth. In a second she had broken from me, and entered the hotel alone.

As for me, I lit a cigar and wandered about the grounds in a reverie for over an hour.

"The next day we left for Ostend, Dolly, as she had allowed me to call her when alone, seemingly utterly oblivious as to what had passed the previous night. She seemed cool and perfectly self-possessed, and met my enquiring look with one equally enquiring. She had already wired to her husband, she informed me, and would not be surprised if he met us at the station. I looked crestfallen, and I fancied she rather enjoyed my discomfiture.

"Monsieur Durville did meet us at the station, and was particularly effusive in his thanks for my care of his wife on the journey. We went to the same hotel, and having secured rooms, did not see each other until dinner. The conversation was all about 'shop'—that is about the mine he was floating. It seemed that he was a French financier, and, judging by the conversation, a man of considerable standing on the Paris Bourse.

" 'I wish to get an Englishman on the Board,' he said, 'in order to get a market made in London. I shall expect him to take at least two thousand shares, and I think I know the man for the purpose. He is, I believe, in Ostend just now. Lord Ravenscourt is his name; but perhaps,' turning to me, 'you may know him?'

" 'Only by name, Monsieur,' I replied. 'I cannot claim acquaintance with him.'

" 'No,' he said, with what I took as a sneer; 'he is well known among what we call the 'investing public,' is he not?'

" 'Perhaps,' I answered, moodily. It was curious how the fact of her husband's presence seemed to dispel the sweet thought that Madame was really interested in me for my own sake. If he would only go away, I thought, how happy we would be. His next sentence gave me an idea.

" 'I have already guaranteed forty thousand pounds of the share capital, and I shall not leave Ostend till I get at least five thousand pounds taken up here. But that should easily be done.'

"The next day Madame walked with me, and together we visited the Casino. Only once did I venture on a caress, and was promptly snubbed.

" 'What if my husband should see us?' she said. 'Wait till he has gone, and then we shall be free.'

"At dinner Monsieur was quietly cheerful. He had met Lord

Ravenscourt, who had promptly agreed to join the Board of the Company, and subscribe two thousand pounds. Again, after dinner, we separated, and I was left to spend my evening at the dance at the Casino, which, by the way, I might have enjoyed, had I not been head over heels in love with Madame Durville.

"The next day another thousand pounds of the wretched capital was subscribed, and I began to think that Monsieur would soon be gone; but alas! I was disappointed. The next two days passed, and no more subscriptions.

" 'I ought to be in Paris, my dear,' Durville said to his wife at dinner, impatiently; 'and yet I have sworn not to go until I have got that paltry thousand subscribed. It is wonderful how slow people are to take up a good thing, and how they rush after things neither I nor any sane man would touch.'

"My mind was made up. Here was a chance to get rid of Monsieur, and apparently invest my thousand pounds to advantage.

" 'Might I see you on business for a moment, Monsieur Durville?' I said, as he and his wife were leaving the dinner-table.

" 'I shall be at your service,' he replied, with a surprised look, 'but I shall be detained for a quarter of an hour, at least. Meanwhile, I shall trust to my wife to keep you from wearying. Will you escort her to my sitting-room, and we can speak there when I return?'

" 'Now Percy,' Madame said, as I closed the door of her comfortable sitting-room, 'what can you have to say to my husband on business? You do not mean to say you want shares in that horrid Company that is engaging all my husband's attention just now? You cannot know anything about it; and is it not stupid to put money into a concern that you do not understand? Of course, it must be quite safe, or my husband would not have so much money in it,' she added, as an afterthought.

" 'Dolly,' I said, catching her suddenly in my arms, 'I don't care a fig about the Company, but until that beastly thousand is subscribed we shall not be alone.'

" 'Now, Percy, this is scandalous,' she cried, freeing herself from my embrace. 'You shall not risk a thousand pounds for that.'

" 'You forget,' I reminded her, 'you yourself said it must be quite safe.'

"Of course it is, but it seems so shameful, just as if I were con-
niving with you to deceive my husband. Promise me that you will
not pay a thousand pounds for that.'

"I shall *not* promise,' I said, and was rejoiced to see a rosy flush
pass across her face. She, too, wants her husband away, I thought,
joyfully, and was confirmed in the resolution I had made.

"A few minutes after, she left the room at her husband's request,
and I promptly offered to subscribe two thousand pounds to the
mine. Surely that will make him go quickly, I thought.

"But, my dear boy,' he replied, 'I wished to give these shares to
men of influence in the financial world. You see, you would prob-
ably sell them on the first slight rise, and so give a feeling of doubt
to the market.'

"I shall not sell them,' I replied. 'I shall keep them as an in-
vestment—that is, of course, unless I urgently require the money,
which I don't anticipate, at least, in the immediate future.'

"Oh, well then, let me see. I tell you what I shall do: I shall
give you the shares on one condition, and that is, that on no account
will you sell them, or even mention the name of the company for at
least one month from now. Is it a bargain?' and he held out his
hand, which I grasped on the instant.

"When can you pay me the money?' he added.

"Just now,' I replied. 'I brought the notes, anticipating your
consent.'

"How confident you English are of always getting your own
way,' he smiled. 'Do you know that I am making you a present
of a few hundreds? The shares will certainly rise that extent as
soon as they are offered to the public.'

"I must thank you for your courtesy to a stranger,' I replied, as
he wrote out a receipt for my money.

"Not at all, you are a friend of my wife's, you know. I shall
leave here to-morrow, and I trust you will act as her escort while I
am absent. It will only be for a day or two, and then I shall relieve
you.'

"I began to withdraw my first opinion of the man, and to think
myself the adventurer instead. He seemed so entirely unsuspecting.
That night we all went to the Casino together, and I was playfully
rebuked by Madame for so recklessly investing my money. Her
husband, however, smiled reassuringly.

"The next morning I was informed through the medium of a little perfumed note, that, before leaving, Monsieur had thought it better that his wife should take apartments in the town. As the note gave me the address and included an invitation to call that afternoon, I felt somewhat consoled, and got through the morning somehow. It was vexatious, however, to be told by a smart maid that Madame had a headache, and had left an apology, 'and would I call to-morrow?'

"For three days I called at least twice a day, only to be told how unwell Madame felt, and how anxious the doctor in attendance was. On the fourth day, however, I was invited to enter, and was shown into a room, where I was soon joined by a middle-aged, hard-featured woman.

"'You are Monsieur Gordon? Well, I have pain in informing you that Madame Durville is suffering from a slight fever, which the doctor says might develop any moment into a dangerous one. She has mentioned your name so often in her sleep that I know that you must be very deeply interested in her. The doctor says that she must on no account be excited or see anyone, and that she must be removed to her husband's care at once. She has at last consented, on condition that I informed you that she would write to you as soon as she was sufficiently recovered, and that I should obtain from you information of your future movements.'

"Obviously there was nothing to do but to express my deep regrets, and to give the address of an hotel in Paris, where I decided to go, in hopes of soon hearing that the woman I adored was convalescent."

At this stage Percy took a long pull of whisky and soda, and we could see that the crisis was approaching.

"I never saw Madame Durville again," resumed Percy, in such a dismal tone that Kennedy asked if she never recovered. "I never saw her again," repeated Percy, "because the whole thing was a plant to get my money. No letter having come from Madame, after three weeks waiting, I made enquiries as to which part of Paris the mansion of Monsieur Durville, the eminent financier, was situated in, and was surprised to learn that there was neither a financier of that name nor a member of the Bourse. The very day the month was up, I enquired where the office of the gold-mining company was, and found that there was no such company. I then communicated with

the police, but I have never to this day heard that their efforts to capture my friends have been successful. To wind up the yarn, I had exactly five pounds in my pocket when I arrived back in Edinburgh from my holiday. All the same, I had had a romance that will last me a considerable time, and when I next go abroad, I can promise you that I shall not be so easily had by half."

"What a yarn," said Kennedy, "and to think that it's all true. Well, gentlemen," rising, "I drain my glass to the day when Monsieur and Madame will make the acquaintance of a French cell, but I do hope that Percy will have an opportunity of punching Monsieur's head first."

"Amen," said Percy and I, in one voice, as our host bade us "good-night."

A Picture in the Academy.

By EDWARD CECIL.

It was Gerald Branston's "At Home," and Number thirty-seven, Templeton Square, was ablaze with light. Ever and anon a carriage or hansom drove up, discharged its quota of guests and passed. There was no doubt that the function was a success. Through the crowded rooms most of the literary and artistic celebrities of the day were passing, while, besides, there was a goodly sprinkling of rising, if not risen, stars. It might be said that the atmosphere was one of genius. Girls who had published broad-margined novels, with passages full of recklessly broad meaning; painters of pictures, none understood; musicians whose music could ignore all else save eccentricity; poets whose poems were imitated from Swinburne, and who went one better than their master—all these types elbowed and pushed one another in the throng.

In one corner of the drawing-room, a young man, more physically handsome than the majority of the men around him, stood watching the crowd. His name, Roger Meredith, was not yet known outside his circle of friends, but it was said that his painting was full of great merit—crude genius, in fact. Being, however, neither impressionist, nor reflective of the French Salon, it lacked admirers.

"My dear fellow," his critics would say, "you are not modern—up-to-date. Of course, your painting is clever. It might appeal to our grandfathers; but how can you expect men and women of to-day to buy it?"

"My success," he had replied once, "must be gained otherwise than by copying the fashions of the hour." It was an answer characteristic of the man. Art was to him too real to admit of fashions. The crush in Gerald Branston's rooms, with the ceaseless talk of fads and theories, tired him. "Is this genius?" he wondered.

"What do you say to the balcony, Mr. Meredith?" Edith Wickham's clear tones recalled his thoughts.

"It would be delightful," he said, and they passed through the crowd.

Without, it was a summer's night, and the stars were visible in the opened heavens. A soft, warm breeze stirred the trees in the square garden.

"What a perfect night!" said the girl, as she sat down in a low chair.

"Yes! it is a great contrast to what we have left," Meredith answered. He leaned over the balcony and watched a passing carriage.

Edith Wickham, as she felt the warm night breeze, laden with the perfume of the flowers in the square garden, fan her gently, was unconscious that Meredith was studying her, as he loved to do. The light of the street lamp glinted on her clear-cut, sensitive features. Her beauty seemed to him that of the cultured, pure-souled woman. Her face was full of thoughts called there by the night. He told himself, as he had done ever since their meeting, that she was perfect, ideal womanhood. What a fool he was to entertain such thoughts! He, a poor, unknown painter, what right had he to think thus, save for the passing moment, of any woman? He had no right—he who had lived for the past year to be worthy of her, he whose life had been cleansed with the mad, wild thought of some day having such a right! What an incentive to success it had been—the thought of this woman! Yet success had not come, and he would be a fool, and worse, if he opened his lips.

"It is a curious life these men and women here to-night delight in," remarked the girl, turning her beautiful eyes upon him.

"Curious! yes, to us it seems so now. Will it in a few years? Youth, you know, is soon stifled."

"Why do you speak like that?"

"Because it is the truth."

"It may not be. Something has made you bitter," she added.

For answer, he looked across the square.

"What is it?" In her voice was a wonderful insistent sympathy, which made him afraid to speak. She compelled an answer. He turned and faced her.

"Why cannot I succeed?" he burst out, abruptly. "There are men who are smart, scarcely clever, who catch the taste of the moment—yes, I suppose, who succeed. Yet I—I who have genius, who see depths and beauties in art they can never understand—I am too often perilously near starving." He tried to smile.

"You talk foolishly," the woman said, bravely, though her heart beat quickly, as a woman's does when she sympathises. "I, at any rate, believe that you will succeed."

In the beautiful eyes was a look of more than sympathy, more than interest. Meredith saw it.

"Edith, it is the thought of you above all others which will make me succeed." The words could not be kept back. "You do not know," he went on, "what the thought of having you to cherish, you to worship, you to toil for, would be to me. May it be mine?"

She did not speak, only let her hand drop to her side, as she took a half-step forward. Her lips smiled as they met his. To Meredith, the lights danced madly; he knew a happiness he had never known. Now that this perfect woman was his, he would compel success. The girl rested willingly in his arms, content that they were those of the man she loved.

After that night on the balcony in Templeton Square, Meredith's life was changed. Every cloud now had its silver lining; his hardest toil was pure joy. He was a man of high ideals; his student life, it is true, had been what it is with most students. Now, however, it must all be altered. He had won the love of a noble, pure, innocent girl. Of that he must be worthy. Edith was to him his ideal of pure womanhood. His love was a holy, cleansing fire. The life that he was to give to her must be absolutely unsullied. Thus Meredith's love was less a passion for the woman he loved, than an act of homage to the virtues she embodied. Though he realised it not, each day saw this to be more and more the case. True, his life was in this way

purified ; true also that, in company with his ideals, his genius soared and attained higher flights. Thus far, love, such as his, is good. The body is scarcely touched, the higher instincts only are appealed to. But it must not be forgotten that such ideals may only be set up to fall, and that such worship is not always merited.

And while it was an ideal which Meredith worshipped, it was a reality—a poor, human, sinful reality which Edith loved. And this last love is the love which endures ; the other is but that which comes, and with the inevitable awakening, vanishes, with a vanishing which is either a mere passing or a transition into a state in which the virtues once idealised are looked on as non-existent. In any case the passing comes, for we live in a world, not of ideals, but of realities.

For the first days of their new-found joy, however, Meredith and Edith were unconscious of all this.

* * * *

The months passed, but success was as far off for Meredith as it had ever been. His great endeavour, and the prize he was to win, filled his days with hope. Almost daily he worshipped before the shrine of his ideal womanhood. Perhaps, as with most worshippers, his worship was somewhat blind.

One night there was again a function at Gerald Branstons, and, just as a year ago, Meredith and Edith alone of the crowd had sought the quiet of the balcony.

"Do you remember almost a year ago ? It was a perfect summer's night, as it is now." Meredith loved to recall how this beautiful woman had allowed him to tell her what she was in his life.

"Can I forget ?" A tone was thrown into the voice, suggesting that the memory was not all joy. The girl's hands clenched. "Oh, God !" she cried, mutely, "why does he not see that it is different ?"

Meredith went on with his memories. He was saying something about her and ideals. She felt that she must stop him.

"No woman is ideal," she broke in, "any more than I am. We have to live in the world, and the world ignores ideals." Her voice was hard and unnatural.

He watched her, amazed, as she removed her left-hand glove. A ray of light played on the perfect whiteness of her bared arm, and caught the dancing lights of a cluster of diamonds on her third finger.

"I can conceal it no longer," she said, softly.

"What is it, Edith ; are you playing with me ?"

She stood, with bowed head, awaiting his scorn. Gradually, after the first shock, he understood that she had plighted her troth to another.

"My God! what have you done?" It was more than a cry of anger, more than one of misery, or even of scorn—it was infinitely sad, infinitely hopeless, the cry of one whose eyes have been opened, whose life's idols have been shattered. "Oh, you are right, you cynics and scoffers! It is I who have been the fool, I who have believed in goodness, in purity, in you, Edith! The thought of you has been an influence from heaven. Ludicrous it seems now—does it not?—now that you have sold yourself for money—for 'diamonds!'" A cruel, bitter smile distorted his lips.

"How cruel you can be! If you knew all—the man's prayers, the sordid details of poverty, the times my love for you has conquered and I have refused to see him, his persistency, my father's entreaties and commands that thus his grey hairs may be saved from endless toil—perhaps you would be merciful. Still, what matters it all? The man is nothing to me, save that I shall marry him. He knows I do not love him. It is you whom I love, but how could I wait on in the dim hope that some day you might be famous. Still, I would wait; I, were I alone in the world, would come to you now, and we would fight the world together. Roger, tell me you love me. I have a soul—it is yours. Kiss me!"

He spurned her. "No, you can never be more to me now than any woman might be. Go—go to your life and find its void. As for me, well, I shall not be such a fool as to believe in goodness and purity or ideals again." He turned on his heel and left her.

The guests thought him mad, as, without a word, he passed quickly through them. On through the streets he strode, with head uncovered and in his evening dress, so that men stopped and gazed at him. His mind was in a seething tumult. What was faith to him now? What were the virtues he had idealised?—tinkling cymbals.

He reached his rooms, and Edith's photograph smiled at him from his mantelpiece. He tore it in pieces. When at last the grey light of dawn streamed through his blinds, he had formed but one resolve. "She is nothing to me now, still I will prove to her that if she had waited, it would not have been in vain."

Throughout the winter, therefore, Meredith painted the picture which was to bring him fame. The subject was carefully chosen,

such that it called forth all his art, for on the canvas before him he painted the allegory of his soul.

“421.—‘The Last Sun-ray.’—Roger Meredith.—‘An old Swiss legend tells how once, in the far distant past, a maiden, to test her lover, bade him ascend one of the mountains which overshadowed their native valley. ‘If,’ she said, ‘you gain the summit before the last sun-ray has left it in darkness, I am yours. Should you fail to do so, I am another’s.’—He tried and failed.”

Thus was Meredith’s picture described in the Academy catalogue. Not only had it been hung, but the judges had placed it on a line in a position of honour. It achieved a sensational success. People spoke of it as the picture of the year. The critics, in the columns of the fashionable journals, discussed its meaning, and, without exception, praised the superb execution with which the subject had been worked out. And in the wake of the critics, the art-jargon talking public prattled amiably.

Roger Meredith was famous. His picture, in grandeur of conception and breadth of treatment, surpassed anything else exhibited.

There was represented a precipitous mountain summit, veiled in snow. An angry sunset illumined the evening sky with its lurid glow. In the background spread out a vista of snow-fields and glacier, and the clouds gathered darkly in the east, massed in threatening grandeur. The mountain summit itself was cold and dark, but above it, a bird of prey, hovering with outstretched wings, was bathed in light. The last sun-ray had just left the snow-clad rocks of the mountain. The suggestion was perfect. The virgin snow had been disturbed by a man’s hurried footsteps. They stopped within a few yards of the summit, and were those of the lover, who, in his mad race, had failed. In those two last footsteps he had stood to gaze on the summit he had struggled to gain, as the last sun-ray died from it. It was now in his grasp, cold and drear, but what was it now, its glory faded?

It never occurred to him to question his failure. The glory and desire of life died. All this was detail to be noticed afterwards. That which immediately arrested attention was the figure of the man; on it the artist had brought to bear the full force of his genius. He had conceived the lover of the legend as a savage clothed in skins. The completion of the legend told how the man cast him-

self over the mountain side, in the extremity of his disappointment.

It was this act that Meredith had depicted. The man's fall—his own victim—into the black depths where the gloom of night lay thick. In the sky above, the sunset lights made one think how grand that figure would have been, standing on the summit, bathed in the last sun-ray, exulting in triumph. Yet now the bronzed face showed no signs of fear. The long black locks flowed upwards in the rush of air; the garments of skin had left the body, and floated above. No muscle of the powerful limbs was stretched in frantic effort to seize some projecting crag or bush. On the features a look of utter indifference was stamped. To the wild, impulsive nature of the savage, the baulking of his desire meant an end. Had he paused, there might have been murder and rape in the village at the mountain's foot; as it was, he fell willingly to self-destruction on the rocks below.

This masterly portrayal of the casting away of a life empty with disappointment brought Roger Meredith to sudden fame.

From the opening of the Academy, he sat day by day on a cushioned seat opposite his picture, listening to the comments passed upon it. The well-to-do country cousins, who were "doing" the Academy, and who read the note of explanation, asked the name of the painter and passed on; the suburban matron, who felt that a visit to the Academy would give an air of culture to her drawing-room conversation, the little, insignificant man, in a threadbare suit of black, who stood so long looking at the picture, and, having no companion, only sighed—all these were types that passed with the crowd. At last, what Meredith waited for came to pass.

It was at a time when the crowd had thinned. A tall, graceful woman, dressed in the fashion of the hour, came up to the picture, and, looking neither to the right nor to the left, gazed at it long and steadfastly. When she turned to go away, Meredith rose, and thus, after a year, he met Edith again. Her self-control almost left her. To be confronted thus, after reading the message of that picture!

She staggered. Grasping the rail behind her, she stood, her face blanched, till the man whose life she had ruined came forward, and fearing she would be noticed, offered her his arm.

"I fear, madam," he said, "you feel faint."

"Thank you," she faltered.

"The heat, perhaps?"

Taking his arm, they passed slowly through the crowd. It was the woman who spoke first.

"You have attained fame." Then she added, "You are, indeed, to be congratulated; all London is talking of your picture."

"What is fame to me now, think you? Could not you read any meaning in the picture?"

She bent her head, for she had understood.

"Then you know what fame is to me—a cold, drear, meaningless thing, from which, like the mountain summit, the glory has faded. A year has passed since we parted. Doubtless it is of small consequence to you now that you have crushed the soul of the man who had made you his god. Life now for me is what it was to the lover—it is a poor, empty thing at best—hollow, full of sham and fraud. I care not what I do with it."

The woman pressed more heavily on his arm. Around them surged the motley crowd. The buzz of conversation sounded in their ears. They stood in the sculpture room, by the statue of a man who had stirred the world by his lofty ideals.

"Spare me, Roger, I know it all. I wronged you. Forgive me. But you are not the only one who suffers. And after all, why should I suffer—why should you?" Her hand was on his arm. She was a beautiful woman, yet he answered her:

"To say 'forgive you' is meaningless. Men do not forget a wrong such as you have done to me. Forgiveness can only come with oblivion." And as to the rest, he was silent, for his love had passed.

They passed into the outer sunshine, and Edith held out her hand over her carriage door. "So you will not come to see me," she said. "You are cruel."

"No," he replied, almost roughly, "I will not."

A mist came into the woman's eyes. How noble this man was to her, as he stood by her carriage, refusing to give society a handle against her name. How worthy of her love—how noble in his strength! A tear dropped beneath her veil.

In reality, there was nothing noble, for, with the falling of his ideal, Meredith's love had passed effectually and for ever, while hers, being more human, had endured. The carriage drove away, and the

man, whose life its occupant had been given the power to glorify, stood bare-headed on the pavement.

* * * *

Two men stood at the window of a West-end club. A man, slovenly dressed in a loose artist's jacket, passed across the street.

"Who was that?" said one. "I think I have seen the face."

"That man," replied his friend, "I once knew well. He is Meredith, the painter of 'The Last Sun-ray,' the great picture of last year's Academy."

"Really! How does it come that he is as he is?"

"That is more than I can say. Poor devil! he is a brilliant failure."

The man passed into the distance. People turned and looked at him, struck by his magnificent physique. He who had been Meredith's friend said nothing more, so the subject dropped. It was not necessary to say much, for the face of the man who had passed told its own tale.

With the passing of time, Edith learnt the lessons of a loveless marriage, and all the God-given impulses of life died. She threw away love when it came, and with its absence, all the influence which lead to nobility, self-sacrifice and God are wanting. In place of these, she has a position in society. At the same time, the life she might have saved, drifts on down the river of time, in the eddies, with the scum. Each year sees it quickly nearing the cataract where the waters fall down into the darkness. In that cataract all waters meet. Beyond it is remorse, and the knowledge of what might have been.

A Mercantile Marriage.

By MARIAN G. GOLDING-BIRD.

CHAPTER I.

A DREARY day in the beginning of February was shedding an atmospheric gloom over the great metropolis, the mild drizzle of the early morning had long since developed into a steady downpour. The main thoroughfares, thronged as usual on a Saturday afternoon, with people, released for a few hours from desks and shops, bore a striking resemblance to a mass of small moving tents, in the shape of dripping umbrellas, under whose insufficient shelter the various owners were speeding where fancy or duty led them. Through the gleaming streets, driving as rapidly as the busy traffic would allow, might have been seen about a quarter to two, a luxuriously appointed brougham; the fleet horses pursued their way up Piccadilly, down Duke Street, and finally turned into King Street, where they drew up, with much curvetting and prancing before the entrance of St. James's Theatre. Three ladies descended from the carriage, and entered the brightly lit corridor, that looked all the more inviting from the contrast it wore to the universal deluge outside.

Once settled in their stalls in the second row, the three pleasure-seekers, an elderly lady and two girls, leant back, with courteous apologies to the occupants of the end seats, whom they had unavoidably disturbed. The soft, crimson plush stalls were very comfortable; they glanced carelessly round them.

"What a full house, Aunt Jane," the elder of the two girls remarked. "How horribly damp those people must be, if they had a long wait at the entrance," looking over her shoulder at the inhabitants of the pit, who were beaming in closely packed rows of good-humoured expectancy.

"Probably, my dear," replied Mrs. St. John, in an absent manner. "Do suggest to Miss Vere not to stare about her so much; such wretched form, really!"

Valerie, thus admonished, turned an amused glance at the slight figure on her other side. "Aunt Jane wishes me to suggest, Ruby

that an icy indifference to your surroundings is a sign of good breeding, nowadays."

Ruby Vere coloured. "Is she vexed with me, Val?"

"She lives in a state of continual vexation with everybody but herself, my child," in a carefully lowered voice. "You do look rather vulgarly excited, now I study your expression."

"I feel it; I am dying for the curtain to go up."

"Really! how very young you still are! I once experienced similar sensations, I believe, but," airily, "a year of Aunt Jane's rule has changed all that; I wish, sometimes, I could get up a little excitement. Cheer up, Ruby, the orchestra is beginning, Orlando and Oliver will step into view directly, and have a fraternal dispute."

"Oh, do tell me more about it, Val, you have been before, haven't you?"

Valerie St. John raised her dark eyebrows in amused surprise. "There isn't time; study your programme. I was here some weeks back with an uncle from the country, who raved straight through, and was especially enraptured with the real water in one of the forest glades."

At this moment the soft crimson curtain commenced slowly to ascend, and while the audience begin to follow, with growing interest, the fortunes of Orlando and Rosalind in the forest of Arden, we will diverge and study the history of the occupants of stalls forty, forty-one and forty-two.

Mrs. St. John was one of a large type, a well-preserved, elderly woman, got up in the latest fashion, whose hard, clear-cut face spoke more of the force of her intellect than the warmth of her heart. Her niece and ward, Valerie, was just as faultlessly apparelled; a dark, handsome girl, who would have been singularly attractive if the young face had not borne such a cynically bored expression. Far less regularly beautiful was her old school-fellow, Ruby Vere, but her sweet, sunny face, and singularly unaffected manner won all who were brought into contact with her. No rich costume adorned her slight figure; a neatly made black dress, and simple hat, spoke plainly of a slender purse.

Few pleasures had brightened her twenty years of life; deprived of her father's care at an early age, the girl had owed her good education partly to an old family friend, and partly to her own assistance with the younger children in Madam Felix's select establishment. She was now regularly installed as teacher in her old school, and

lived with her mother in inexpensive rooms in West Kensington. Valerie St. John, the reigning favorite of the head class, had always shown a warm affection for the young pupil-teacher, and had done much by her influence to smoothe the less fortunate girl's career. Since Valerie had come out, Ruby's rare holidays had generally been spent in Gloucester Gardens; and Valerie, who was a very faithful friend, generally, as on this occasion, planned some treat to mark the day.

In the meantime *As you Like it* was proceeding merrily on its way; scene after scene of fairylike prettiness appeared before the appreciative audience. Ruby's rapt gaze never left the leafy glades, where Rosalind's lovely face, set off to double advantage by her quaint page's dress, claimed her attention. She turned to her quiet companion during an interval.

"Wouldn't it be lovely to be able to act like that, Val?"

Valerie started, the remark had evidently disturbed some deep train of thought. "Yes, it would, I suppose," she remarked at length. "Orlando is splendid, it's a good caste all through—unusually so, but Alexander is always charming."

"People knew how to love in those days," replied Ruby, dreamily. "I should have acted like Rosalind and Celia, Val, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly not; I should have stayed at the Court and toadied my uncle, had a good time all round, and probably have espoused a wealthy neighbouring potentate; in fact," with a bitter little laugh, "just what, in a less high-sounding way, I am going to do. Haven't you heard? never mind now, I'll tell you all about my Orlando during tea."

"Well, Val, what have you got to tell me?"

The girls had returned from the theatre, had duly partaken of tea, in Mrs. St. John's elegant drawing-room, and had now retired to Valerie's boudoir for a chat.

"Something interesting, I hope," glancing curiously at her friend's face, which bore, just then, its coldest expression,

"Oh, intensely so; haven't you noticed my fetter?" raising her left hand slowly from her lap, and regarding the diamond circlet that glittered on its third finger with anything but admiration.

"Are you engaged, Val?" breathlessly; "I did notice your ring at tea, but you always wear such beauties."

"Do I?" reflectively, "well I suppose I always shall now. Yes, I

am engaged, Ruby, to Sir James Morrison. Are you not going to congratulate me?"

"But it is all so sudden. When I was here last month, and we went for a walk in the park with Mrs. St. John, we met Sir James, didn't we—a tall, dark man?"

"An accurate description," shortly.

"And you are happy," doubtfully.

Valerie hesitated, and moved before answering, with an impatient gesture towards the window. "Aunt Jane is, and you know, Ruby, I dare not offend her; she is capable of leaving her money to a lunatic asylum if I did, and I haven't enough of my own to keep me in dresses; I am no Rosalind, and should regard 'love in a cottage,' with decided disfavor."

"Even with Orlando?"

"Certainly. Orlandos don't exist now-a-days, my child,—off the stage—but a good settlement does; haven't I proved an apt pupil in Aunt Jane's school? I thought differently at Madame's, didn't I? Don't look shocked, you dear little bundle of romance, we are very well suited; my future lord and master doesn't go in for sentiment any more than I do—it's a very equal bargain, he gets a good-looking wife to manage his domestic arrangements, and I get plenty of this world's goods—see?"

Ruby's blue eyes filled with tears. "Oh, Val, you can't mean it; I always thought you cared for Mr. Desborough."

"Well, frankly, Ruby, I very nearly did once, but that delusion didn't last."

"It has with him; he came in to see mother the other evening, and I am sure he adores you."

"Then he must learn to transfer his admiration to a more appreciative shrine, that's all. Here's Simmonds come to announce your cab; so glad to have had you, dear—au revoir!"

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning dawned brightly, Ruby started for church, she generally attended one near their rooms, with her mother; but Mrs. Vere had wakened with one of her troublesome neuralgic headaches, so her daughter set off to a distant church, renowned for its exquisite

singing. The service was fast drawing to a close, when glancing towards the opposite aisle, Ruby met Max Desborough's gray eyes fixed with sudden recognition on her face. He joined her at the conclusion, in the porch.

"I didn't know you ever came here, Miss Vere. I thought you went to that gloomy-looking edifice near you."

"So we do, but mamma has a headache, and when she stays at home on Sundays, I generally make for Wells Street."

"They sing capitally here, that's why I come," frankly. "You are a good walker, Miss Vere, unless you indulged in a 'bus."

"I walked; I don't get much exercise in the week. Valerie St. John says——" she suddenly stopped; this quiet-looking young man might not care to talk just now of Val; he evidently read her thoughts.

"Yes, Miss Vere; what does your friend say?"

"Only that a sedentary life like mine would drive her mad."

"Indeed? well, Miss St. John's life is finally settled for her, I hear."

"So she told me yesterday; it seems a very good marriage."

"Very," drily, "if plenty of money content her."

Ruby's brow clouded. "Sir James Morrison is very good-looking," she replied, rather coldly.

"No doubt you approve, Miss Vere; most ladies do stand up for this sort of thing, but," a look of intense wrath flashed over his usually self-contained face, "Valerie St. John is not happy in this engagement. She boasts, I know, of not believing in love; some day she may be unpleasantly forced to do so."

Ruby felt uncomfortably conscious that her companion might regret, in calmer moments, the peep he was letting her have into his own feelings. He loved Valerie, and Valerie certainly had encouraged his attentions.

She parted from the young barrister at her own door, with an intense feeling of pity for him in her warm, girlish heart.

Valerie's marriage, which had been fixed for Easter week, was much to that young lady's indignation, consummated before, not after, Lent.

Mrs. St. John received an unexpected summons to go to Italy, to cheer up an invalid sister. "I may be away for weeks," she informed Sir James. "I suppose Valerie had better accompany me."

"Unless she will consent to be married quietly, the day before you go," the young man replied.

Mrs. St. John visibly caught at the suggestion. "A capital idea, if she will only see it; perhaps you had better speak to her."

Sir James agreed, and Mrs. St. John went in search of her niece, who presently strolled into the room, looking slightly more bored than usual.

"You want to speak to me?" Valerie remarked.

"I do, about our wedding. This foreign trip of your aunt's upsets all our plans; I have been proposing to Mrs. St. John to get it over before she goes; it would be ridiculous for you to go to Nice with her, when we are going on the Continent ourselves directly."

Valerie stared at her companion. "And you coolly suggest that I should marry you in three weeks?"

"Why not? A good excuse for a quiet affair, and then we can have a longer time away; you like travelling, you know."

The girl stood playing nervously with her bangles, then she moved, impulsively nearer to her *fiancé*. "Jim, I can't, really; please don't join with Aunt Jane in persecuting me, you know how I hate it all;" then, with a sudden realization of what she was saying, "I shouldn't have said that, of course."

"Does all this mean, Valerie, that after all you *do* care for that barrister-fellow, who has been hanging about you all the winter?"

"You have a poor opinion of me, if you think that I would have accepted you if I did," she replied sadly. "If," emphatically, "I had cared for anyone, I really believe I have it in me to stick to him, but you see I don't."

"Then, my dear girl," the momentary earnestness departing from his voice, "why this fuss? When a thing has to be done, get it over, that's my advice. Marry me, the end of the month, and I fancy we shall put in a very decent time abroad." And so the matter was finally arranged.

The Morrisons started for the Continent a couple of days before Mrs. St. John joined her sister at Nice.

Time passed, and Ruby at last secured a piece of good fortune on her own account. A pupil's aunt taking a fancy, on her visits to the school, to the bright, young English governess, and needing a resident one for her own small daughter, after due enquiries, offered her the post and a good salary.

"We are going abroad directly," she added, "and altogether, my dear Miss Vere, I think you will have a pleasant time with us."

At first Ruby hesitated, she could not leave her mother ; but Mrs. Vere soon settled that objection. "If you go, dear—and it would be a thousand pities to refuse—I will share your Aunt Kate's flat, she has often asked me to join her, and shall be quite happy."

So this being comfortably arranged, Ruby entered on her new duties with a light heart, only shadowed by her secret regret at leaving Max Desborough to get on as best he could without her ready sympathy. The last few weeks, Max had often strolled up to the Veres' rooms, sometimes with flowers or concert tickets, oftener just to pass away an hour in his friend's company.

"We shall probably meet before long," he remarked, on the occasion of his last visit, "the Beckfords are old friends of mine, and I have promised to look them up."

In the meantime, the Morrisons' honeymoon had not been a success. Valerie's persistent cold indifference of manner was, no doubt, partly to blame for this unpleasant state of things, and unfortunately, now that Sir James had taken a *château* for a month, in a pretty village among the Alps ; the comparative loneliness of their life did not seem to draw the young couple any nearer together.

The Beckfords were settled near, and the two families soon became friendly. They found they had mutual friends at home, and Ruby's society proved a great pleasure to Valerie just then.

It was like playing at being a governess ; little Fay Beckford, a delicate, very loveable child, for whose health mountain air had been ordered, required a careful playfellow more than a teacher, and the child soon conceived a warm affection for Lady Morrison's beautiful face. Max Desborough's arrival brought in an element of discord from the first, for, marvellous to relate, cold, indifferent James Morrison, suddenly developed an amazing reserve force of jealousy ; here, he reflected, lay the cause of his wife's coldness ; she had dared to marry him for his money, while caring for another man. Too proud to interfere, he watched, with the gloomiest forebodings, Valerie's very evident pleasure in her old lover's society ; the significant fact escaped him that Miss Vere and her little pupil were always one of the party.

The Morrisons were just finishing their rather late breakfast one morning about a week later, when little Fay Beckford came dancing in at the open window.

"Please, Lady Morrison, mamma sent me with this note, and I'm to bring the answer."

"Are you really, Fay?—what a clever little woman. Come over here, and see if you like these cakes."

But the child shook her golden head. "I have had a big breakfast, and lots of cake. I want to talk to Sir James," going over to where that gentleman was moodily scanning the paper. However, his gloom was not proof against the sweet little face at his side.

"Well, you sprite, what have you got to tell me?"

"Heaps! This is my birthday," triumphantly, "and I'm to have a party to-night, no children, grown-up people—that's what the note's about. You'll come, won't you?"

Sir James laughed. "To play at dolls, puss? How old are you to-day?"

"Nine! and I *never* play with dolls now, and mine is a proper grown-up party. I'm to dine late, and Mr. Desborough says he will take me down."

Valerie laughed more cheerfully than she had done for a long time. "You precocious child; tell mamma we'll come, we may as well," looking doubtfully at her husband.

"You can go of course, Valerie, if you wish; I shall not be back in time for the meal. You forget we had arranged to go to Vevey to-day; now with this attraction to keep you, I suppose you won't go?"

Valerie caught the barely veiled sneer in her husband's tones, but to do her justice, an idea of the cause never entered her head. You see, she knew why Max had decided to spend his holiday in Switzerland this spring, and rejoiced that Ruby's blue eyes had long since charmed away the sore feeling in the young lawyer's breast; but then Sir James was as ignorant of this pleasant state of things as was Ruby herself.

"Of course I can't go to Vevey, and be home in time for Fay's party," looking affectionately at the child. "I shall go to-day and do my business, and if I get back in time, will fetch you."

"As you please, of course, Will you and Miss Vere," turning to the child, "come up to lunch with me, Fay?—I shall be all alone."

"Oh, yes!" eagerly; "and may we have ices, dear Lady Morrison?"

"Certainly, my pet. Now run off, and give mamma my message."

Valerie strolled into the pretty drawing-room of the quaint Swiss

house, when she had seen the little visitor off the premises. She was feeling more cheerful this morning, had felt since the last evening, when Max, who had come up after dinner, and found his old lady-love alone, had seized the opportunity to confess to her how he hoped one day to win Ruby for his wife.

"Do you think me very fickle, Lady Morrison?"

"I think you very wise," heartily; "Ruby is a darling, and I do hope you *will* win her."

The two were talking earnestly, so earnestly that they did not notice Morrison's entrance: that gentleman accorded Max a rather frigid greeting, and had treated his wife with an added degree of coldness ever since.

CHAPTER III.

FAY's birthday passed merrily, and her first dinner-party proved a decided success. The evening was over, and Sir James had never appeared.

"My husband has been detained unexpectedly," Valerie remarked, with well-feigned carelessness, "and is probably too tired to come on here."

The others agreed, and set off in a body to escort their guest the few yards down the road to her own house.

A servant advanced to meet his mistress. "A telegram, my lady; it has only just come."

Valerie glanced through the message. "It is all right, Arnold, your master will return to-morrow afternoon, he has had to go on to Geneva."

This faithful old servant of the Morrison family deserved the favor that his young mistress had consistently shown him. His devotion to his master had never wavered since the days when "Master Jem" had coaxed many a dainty morsel from the then new butler.

The old man locked up this strange "foreign bit of a place," as he mentally called it, and retired, shaking his gray head sadly. "They don't hit it off," he muttered to himself, "and yet she's a sweet young lady."

Valerie waited lunch the next day, in the vain hope that her husband might return in time for it; but no sign of the absent one

appearing, she sat down for the first time in her brief married life by herself, and was astonished to find how lonely she felt. She was slowly demolishing a plate of jelly, when to her amazement the door was hastily opened, and the generally correct Arnold rushed in.

"Oh, my lady, there has been an accident, and——"

"Hush, my good man, you will frighten your mistress." Max laid a firm hand on the old man's arm, and put him aside. "There is a rumour, Lady Morrison, that the train from Geneva has run into a goods train, and all sorts of wild reports are in circulation, but we have no grounds to suppose that your husband is in it."

"But," turning white, "he may be. Mr. Desborough, can we not go and see for ourselves?"

"Of course; the breakdown was only a few miles away. I have ordered the inn dog-cart, and thought I might drive you there."

Valerie assented eagerly, and it seemed to her strained nerves that their destination would never be reached; and when at last they drew up at the station nearest the scene of the disaster, an engine and a couple of carriages carrying relief soon landed them beside the wrecked train. No arguments, and he tried many, that Max could use, would prevail on Valerie to spare herself more than one sickening sight, by waiting while her companion searched the low shed, where by this time the more seriously injured had been conveyed.

An English doctor, who had been on the train, met them outside. "Might have been worse," he began, taking them, evidently, for fortunate fellow-passengers, with professional cheerfulness: "only one man actually killed, the rest will do, I think."

"And that one man?" enquired Max.

"A fellow-countryman, I am sorry to say; head and face crushed beyond recognition; card case in his coat pocket—a Sir James Morrison. My dear young lady!" springing forward in time to catch Valerie's swaying form. "Poor girl, how unpardonably careless of me," turning to Desborough, "who is she?"

"Lady Morrison! Can't you do anything for her, man?"

"Only a faint, my dear sir; see," bending over where Valerie lay on the soft grass, "she is coming to now; here, get some brandy, they have plenty in there. Now, madam," putting the glass to the girl's white lips, "drink this."

Valerie pushed the glass away impatiently. "Take me to him," rising in a dazed sort of way.

"My dear lady, I cannot; the poor fellow is terribly crushed. I will show you the coat and card-case."

"You will show me *him*," firmly. "Please go now."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders, glanced half doubtfully at Desborough, and then led his companions into a small shed, where lay a terribly mangled form that turned Valerie sick to look at. Yes, there was no doubt; the long, light coat *was* Jem's, and the silver card-case contained several of the familiar cards. No one could have traced any likeness in the poor, crushed face. With a low cry Valerie turned away; she did not faint this time, but turned to Max.

"Please take me home," she said, quite quietly; "I can do nothing now."

Kindly Mrs. Beckford and Ruby received Valerie at the door of the *châlet*, and for the next few days did everything they could think of to comfort and help her. The funeral was over before Mrs. St. John, who had been wired for by Ruby, arrived. The sight of her niece in her deep mourning seemed at first to affect her.

"A terrible thing, this, my dear; I am sure I have not had an hour's sleep since I heard. What a good thing it wasn't a love marriage, and you haven't had time to get fond of him."

Valerie looked up indignantly, her dark eyes blazing. "Aunt Jane, have you no heart? I *do* love Jem, and shall never be happy again, for," with a low sob, "he never knew I cared."

"Well, my dear, that's all very nice and proper, and I can make allowance for a certain amount of temper. You need a tonic, I dare say; we must get you back to England, this wretched place is depressing to a degree."

So Valerie, too stunned to care where she lived, returned to London, and felt as if the weeks since she had last seen it had been a terrible dream.

Ruby's engagement to Max Desborough pleased her as much as anything could now, the two were so genuinely happy, and so thoughtful in their friendship for her. Mrs. Beckford resigned her claim to Ruby at Lady Morrison's request.

"Let me have her for awhile," she had pleaded; "Ruby comforts me." A move on the young widow's part that intensely annoyed Mrs. St. John. She had lost her old influence over Valerie, she realized it more every day; the girl had grown beyond her, she could not refuse her strong wish to have Ruby as a companion, as Valerie, she knew

would, in that case, only too gladly take a house for herself, and to give up the chaperonage of a beautiful and rich young widow, was the last thing Mrs. St. John intended. So she veiled her wrath under a pleasant society smile, but she did not forgive the girl's rebellion. Young Lady Morrison had all unknowingly raised up against herself a very bitter feeling in her aunt's coldly calculating heart.

A few days later, Mrs. St. John, tempted by the balmy air, had dismissed her carriage, and turned into the Park before returning home for her favorite cup of tea; she had turned down an unfrequented path, when a tall figure coming towards her at a rapid rate attracted her attention. She glanced with a passing curiosity at the stranger. But was it a stranger? With a smothered scream she stopped dead.

"James!"

"Well, Mrs. St. John, are you not pleased to see me?"

"Of course, but," gasping, "Valerie has just paid a huge bill—for your tomb at Vevey."

"Most kind of her, I am sure," bitterly, "but you see it is *not* my tomb, my dear lady."

"But they saw the man in your coat."

"So I heard at Vevey. Simply explained: I travelled from Geneva with a poor wretch, who was in the last stage of some lung complaint, he was coughing and shivering, and I gave him the light coat you speak of, which I did not want; I forgot my card case was in it. He was killed, as you know, and I was probably, at the time my loving friends were weeping over my supposed corpse, lying in blissful unconsciousness with concussion of the brain, in a neighbouring shanty. From there I was moved to a hospital, where, as an unknown Englishman, I was nursed back to health. I arrived in town early this morning, thinking to surprise you all; but I got a surprise myself," bitterly. "Is this rumour true, that Desborough simply lives in your house?"

Mrs. St. John hesitated, then a curious smile parted her thin lips. "Valerie insists on receiving her own friends, James; she will not receive any advice from me, I regret to say."

The young man paled visibly. "A supposed widow these few weeks, and turning back to her old lover—if she ever forgot him. I will not return with you now, Mrs. St. John; you can break the good news," sarcastically, "to my mourning widow."

Mrs. St. John hurried back to Gloucester Gardens, and walked

straight into the room where Valerie and Ruby were sitting. She went up to her niece and touched the *crêpe* dress.

"You can leave this off, Valerie, it doesn't suit you; I mean it, my dear. It appears we trusted too much to circumstantial evidence." And in a few concise words she described her strange interview to her astounded listeners. Valerie turned ghastly, as her aunt ended with: "He seems to be feeling your most natural mistake very unjustly, my dear; refused to come round and see you this evening, said he must 'show at the club.'"

"There is some mistake, Val, dear," Ruby tried to whisper, but Valerie, knowing the terms on which they parted, was only too ready to believe her aunt's account.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next morning did not mend matters. Sir James Morrison did come it is true, but his greeting to his wife effectually froze any feeling she might otherwise have shown. He informed her, with elaborate politeness, that having now arranged all his business matters, and considerably put out the next heir, he intended to go down to his estate in the Midlands the next day, and would wish her to accompany him.

"Till the inevitable gossip over my resurrection has blown over," he remarked, grimly, "we had better enjoy a little rural retirement."

The Morrisons' country place proved charming, but Valerie had no heart to appreciate its beauties. Any attempt to talk over the last sad weeks, and explain matters with her husband, met with a cold repulse.

Mrs. St. John, in the meantime, pursued her usual round of pleasures, hugging herself with the kind thought that she had effectually punished her ungrateful niece. Her conscience had long since ceased to make itself unpleasant. However, Nemesis was on her tracks; and her plan of spending a few weeks at the Morrisons' beautiful old Elizabethan house, was not destined to be fulfilled. Valerie's dark days were nearly over, though she did not know it.

She was sitting in her boudoir, idly reading, over again, a closely-written letter received by the mid-day post; the girl looked wretchedly ill, dark circles under her eyes made her naturally clear

complexion look painfully white. The door opened, and her husband entered.

"Here is a note from your aunt, you had better see to it. She says you never answer her letters, so she applies to me. She wants to come here next month, needs country air and a rest."

"Then you will have to entertain her; I decline to most emphatically; also I wish to go up to town just then myself."

"May I enquire why?"

"Ruby Vere has asked me to attend her wedding, and I would not willingly disappoint her."

"Miss Vere going to be married! I didn't even know she was engaged. Who is the man?"

"You must have been singularly unobserving at Vevey, if you didn't notice what was going on. Max Desborough proposed to her almost directly after she came to be with me in Gloucester Gardens."

Morrison came close to his wife's chair, and stood leaning rather heavily on its high carved back. "Did Mrs. St. John know this the day she met me in the Park?"

"Why, of course. What are you looking so strangely at me for, Jim? Surely,"—a sudden glimpse into what her husband had been thinking all these weary weeks floated through Valerie's mind—"surely you did not imagine —" but her sentence has never been finished to this day.

With a sudden movement, Morrison bent down, and threw his arms round her.

"Forgive me, Val! I have been mad with jealousy all along, and that old harradan led me to believe that before I was cold in my grave, you were letting Desborough console you."

Valerie didn't reply for a few minutes, she just sat quietly, with an inexpressively sad look on her sweet face, for sorrow had wonderfully softened Valerie.

"As I told you once before, Jim, you must have a high opinion of me. Aunt Jane always hated me, I know, and I suppose I deserve that you should think so lightly of me; you see I always mocked at love."

Sir James drew his wife's proud little head gently down on his shoulder. "So did I once, my darling, but we have both learnt our lesson in a hard school, since then, haven't we?"

The dressing gong sounded before the newly united husband and wife had finished nearly all they had to say to each other.

"I will answer this," Sir James remarked, grimly, putting Mrs. St. John's dainty, perfumed note into his pocket, "and I fancy our dear relative will *not* benefit by our kind hospitality; but no doubt her good heart will rejoice at the happy ending of the 'mercantile marriage' she carried through so effectually. Such marriages, I see now, are a dangerous experiment, Val; though, to quote your old favourite, 'all's well that ends well.'"

James Pavn.

By SARAH CATHERINE BUDD.

Author of "HAYDN," "MOZART," "CARMEN SYLVA," etc., etc.

IN Trollope's clever and amusing book of recollections called "What I Remember," he speaks of many well known people, and gives delightful anecdotes concerning them.

His Florence recollections are especially interesting, full of life and incident, but as the years roll on, falling across his book like a sad refrain, come often the words "Alas! he too has gone to join the great majority." Just so it is now, familiar figures seem to hasten across the great stage of life, and "their place knows them no more."

One of the saddest things about growing very old, must be the thought of outliving all one's contemporaries. An aged man can never have a levelheaded talk—so to speak—of the days when he was young.

Said a very old man one day—speaking of a great town extension to a relative in the prime of life: "Ah! how things are altered! When we were boys that place was a copse, and on fine bright mornings, we used to take a short cut through there to see the hounds throw off; don't you remember what fun it was? and the dim eyes brightened and the old lips trembled, but catching sight of a blank face gazing at him with surprise—the light and color faded. "Oh I forgot," he added with a deep sigh, "that must have been long before your time."

Here and there the very old are left, but a ceaseless stream of

young, old, and middle-aged people are passing away from us every day, all hurrying to join "the great majority." Some of these we can indeed ill spare, like James Payn, the subject of this slight sketch. His bright, cheerful, and unselfish nature, gathered around him a very large circle of friends, and although he had been a great sufferer for many years, nothing could cloud for long his brave spirit, or arrest (except quite recently) his literary labours. He loved the profession of letters, and we find him saying in his "*Gleams of Memory*," "If I were to live twenty lives I would choose no other profession."

James Payn was born at Cheltenham in the year 1830. His father, who held a clerkship under the Thames Commissioners and kept the Berkshire Harriers, gave his son what is called a liberal education. Payn professes to remember little of his earlier years, or to have nothing worth telling about it. He had an intense dislike to the dark. He says "In the night-time I suffered horribly, indeed, the effect of the dark with its loneliness upon me was appalling. Scores of times have I crept out of my cot and waited on the stairs till the servants trooped out from prayers, and I knew that in a few minutes I should have company." This pointed to a strong imagination and a highly-strung nervous system.

Later on he was haunted with the idea that he was the only person in the world who had any real existence; that the others were but shadows, and he wrote a poem about it beginning—

"When the doors have closed behind us, and the voices died away.
Do the singers cease their singing, and the children end their play?"

which strikes me as quite remarkable poetry for a boy. In his youth Payn lived for years among the Berkshire downs, with its vast expanse of springy turf, its delicious air and grand wild beauty. There is something absorbing in the love which the free open downs inspire—because perhaps of the vast billowy surface, the lights and shadows chasing each other over the short mossy turf, the sweet crisp air, the glorious feeling of freedom and immensity. This love for the downs is something like a passion for the sea, or the great Yorkshire moors, and we gather from some remarks of Payn, in his "*Gleams of Memory*," that he felt all this intensely.

As a small boy, however, the two things which his memory associated with the downs were hawking and hoop-hunting. The

first lasted only for a short time, but the hawks were very picturesque "with their hoods and bells, waiting on the wrists of their keepers to be loosed at the prey."

Hoop-hunting Payn describes as a most fascinating game for boys. Six or seven hoops were started off in a high wind, up hill and down dale over the great billowy surface, the boys of course following in hot pursuit. The hoops, however, were never fairly caught, their speed far exceeding that of a bicycle. Payn remarks: "I have known a hoop run five miles without stopping, and sometimes when a certain aroma comes to me, I am for half a minute a boy again, capless, careless, with my foot on the turf, and the wild west wind in my hair."

There was a certain old Berkshire squire, well over seventy, who had been one of the handsomest men of his day, and of whom Mr. Payn entertained the most lively recollections. Certainly he must have been a character, a type of a race long since passed away. He had taken a great fancy to the little "Jimmy," and one day when the old squire was out for a drive in his brougham, in which his "huge body fitted like a chestnut in its shell," he invited the little chap to dinner, holding out as an inducement a "Severn salmon and a couple of Aylesbury ducks."

Everyone who was acquainted with Mr. Payn, knew his passion for the game of whist, and it was the same bluff old Berkshire squire who initiated him first into its mysteries. There is something rather comical in the thought of the little boy with deep intent look, sitting by the side of the old squire, and trying hard to understand the game. His love for whist has also its pathetic side. When poor Payn was too ill to go to his club, friends came from the Athenæum about twice a week to play his favourite game, and so cheer a little the weary hours. Indeed, Payn had endeared himself to so many people, that friends rallied round the invalid, and did what man could do to help.

He touchingly says a little time before the end came—"Oh, friendship, whose smile has been always dear to us, but of the greatness of whose fond and faithful heart we have never guessed, forgive us for our former ignorance."

It is rather surprising to find that neither Payn's school nor college days can be called a success in the way of learning. Indeed, he very frankly tells us he "never liked Latin, and detested Greek."

"Great heavens!" he goes on to say, "what have I not suffered from that hateful tongue. One hears talk of the 'Dead Hand' and its enormities, but what are they compared with the brutalities inflicted on the young by the dead languages?"

Mr. Pavn was intended for the army, so after attending several schools and having various teachers, he was sent to Woolwich. Here his health was bad, and his surroundings were so entirely uncongenial, that the idea of entering the army was given up, and he studied with a private tutor, in order to prepare for Cambridge and the Church.

There is no doubt but that the whole bent and bias of young Pavn's mind lay towards the profession of literature. He tells us that he had "spoilt reams of good paper with juvenile compositions." Let anyone try to keep a young fellow, who is a born painter, from his paints, a musician from his music, or a writer from his pen, and they will understand the futile attempts made to draw Pavn into any of the ordinary professions.

During the time spent at a private tutor's, his first poem was published in Leigh Hunt's journal, but, as may be imagined, without being paid for. Soon after followed "Ballads from English History," accepted by Harrison Ainsworth for "Bentley's Miscellany," of which the author says, "looking back at them at this great distance of time, I seem to recognise some merit in them." In accepting them, however, the editor writes to the young author that the "circumstances of the magazine were such that it could offer no pecuniary remuneration to its contributors." One is here irresistibly reminded of the clever way in which Harrison Ainsworth led Mrs. Henry Wood on, from year to year, to contribute to, and embellish his pages, and yet entirely without remuneration.

After this, Pavn sent his first prose article to "Household Words," entitled "Gentleman Cadet," and giving a short sketch of life at the Woolwich Academy. To the young author's great delight, this article was accepted by Charles Dickens, or "the master," as Pavn always lovingly called him, and this was the beginning of a life-long friendship between the two. For this article Pavn received three guineas, and very characteristically spent it all in buying a Berkshire pig for his tutor.

Pavn's Cambridge days were very pleasant ones, and at Trinity he was exceedingly popular, but he made no great figure there, and was

content with an ordinary degree. His not taking honours was set down to his being in love, for at this time he was engaged to one of the prettiest of girls, who subsequently became "one of the best wives that man ever had." During his undergraduate days, he published a book, called "*Stories from Boccaccio*," which was not a financial success; but the author was quite satisfied, as it brought him the friendship of some Fellows of his college worth knowing.

Gradually all idea of entering the church was abandoned, and, on leaving Cambridge, Mr. Payn took the bold step of marrying, and at the same time making the choice of literature as a profession. This certainly seems astounding, when we learn that his literary income for the first year was about thirty-five pounds. However, we find that it was not so very surprising after all, for Mr. Payn had always a private income, and his literary earnings were "extras." He remarks, in speaking of this time, "We had little to live upon, but sufficient for our needs. I have always shrunk away from the cold touch of poverty, and am thankful to say, I have never felt it."

The first year of his marriage, in 1854, was spent at Ambleside, the Lake District being his favourite haunt. At this time the wine of life was sparkling for James Payn. He says, "I was exceedingly happy, and we led an idyllic life in Rydal Cottage, under the shadow of Nab Scar, and lulled by the music of the beck that flowed at the garden foot." It was in the Lake District that he first made the acquaintance of Miss Martineau, Matthew Arnold and his brother, besides many other people of note.

The Lake country is known to most people in its summer dress, but Mr. Payn admired its winter aspect. "To see it put on its winter garb," he says, "from the white cap on the hills to the vast snow-shroud over vale and mountain, is a glorious experience, yet how seldom is it taken advantage of! That on a frosty morning one can leave London, and the same night behold the skaters upon Rydal Lake by moonlight, is an idea that never occurs to anyone, yet no transformation scene can be more complete. It is a veritable fairy-land, with its isle and rock and snow. It is no wonder that, of all the splendours of his mountain home, Wordsworth dwells upon this as its crowning glory."

We now find Mr. Payn beginning his literary labours in good earnest, and for thirty-five years he made one thousand five hundred pounds per annum. He sometimes wrote for the "Westminster

Review," and became a regular contributor to "Household Words" and "Chambers's Journal." To this last magazine he succeeded Mr. Leitch Richie as editor, in the year 1858. It was in this journal his "Family Scapegrace" came out, afterwards followed by "Lost Sir Massingberd," which increased the circulation by twenty thousand, and raised the author at one bound into the foremost rank of story-tellers. Payn says "The idea of the story occurred to me on the top of a coach, and it was the best day's drive I ever took."

After the success of "Lost Sir Massingberd," many other books followed, all more or less popular. "By Proxy" is considered one of his best works, the scene of which is laid in China. Payn was an extremely prolific writer; the names of his books in the British Museum catalogue exceed a hundred.

We may say that his was a life of well-directed labour and of deserved success. It is true he never made a slave of himself with regard to his writings, but he loved his work, cared not for change, and was never so happy as when in his pleasant home, surrounded by his numerous family and his many friends. His was certainly a life of labour, for besides being a maker of books, he was also reader, editor and journalist, even retaining his post as editor of the "Cornhill" as late as 1896. Payn was eminently humorous, and he speaks of the "Cornhill" as being "suited to hunting men, as it was readable from cover to cover."

In his capacity as publisher's and editor's "reader," he was always willing to lend a helping hand to beginners in literature, always according them warm sympathy. Many owed their early appearance in print to his wise discrimination. Anthony Hope, Morley Roberts, Barry Pain, and Henry Seton Merriman are examples of this.

A publisher's or editor's "reader" must hold a very trying position. The great flood of MSS. poured forth every day for him to wade through must be depressing indeed (though, as a matter of fact, he does not read them all). The MSS. which had better have been left unwritten are legion, and the calm assurance of their several authors simply maddening.

I fancy it is Gladstone who once said to a would-be author, "See first that you have something to say, and then say it." The poor "reader" must groan in his inmost soul, and wish this advice were always carried out.

There is, however, another side to the picture. A good or bad

impression concerning a MS. must depend a little upon the mental and bodily state of the "reader" himself. When there is something unusually bright in his own feelings, or in his circumstances, and "a bird sings in his heart all day long," it is easy to be patient with stupid, and even foolish, writers. True, he at once puts aside the MSS. bearing well-known names, and, secondly, type-written articles, for consideration, but he does not frown darkly, and curse inwardly at the great "rank and file" of papers still lying before him, nor does he—after reading a few words, perhaps, at the beginning and end of the MSS.—sweep them all away with a disgusted hand. No! he thinks it just possible that there may be something good in all that rubbish, and so he exercises a little patience. Certainly, a toothache, a heartache, a fit of the "blues," or even a bilious attack will throw a dark shadow over everything. Mr. Payn was an exceptionally good "reader" and judge of literature, although even he was not infallible, for it will be remembered he refused "John Inglesant." Perhaps some of the best known of his books—after "Lost Sir Massingberd" and "By Proxy"—are "Married Beneath Him," "Carlyon's Year," "Kit: a memory," "A Country Family," "Not Wooed, but Won," "The Talk of the Town," "What He Cost her," and "The Heir of the Ages."

Payn continued some of his beloved literary labours to within a comparatively short time of his death; his "Notes" in the "Illustrated London News" being eagerly welcomed from week to week. It has been said, with truth, "That no man was more absolutely free from envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness."

"In all the volumes that he published, there is scarcely a line that could wound the feelings of any human being, nor a sentence that could taint the mind of any innocent girl. All his writings are in harmony with that practical, but undogmatic, religion which underlay his character."

Mr. Payn, as I have before remarked, was a great sufferer, but was ever surrounded by the most devoted love and care. His wife was a sister of Sir Peter Edlin, a well-known Middlesex judge, and he had a large family. Most of his daughters are married, one being the wife of Mr. Buckle, the editor of "The Times."

In a pathetic article called "The Backwater of Life," written at the beginning of his illness, Mr. Payn says, in view of the devotion surrounding him, "Oh, love which cherishes its object when all that

makes it lovely has departed—that slaves for it, and sacrifices its all to give it daily comfort—we know you now as we have never known you before.” Then he goes on to speak of the “weir” of death, which lies just below the “backwater.” “Sometimes, on darker nights,” he says, “its roar is menacing, but, after awhile, the sinister sound is lost, and it changes to a deep solemnity; then we wonder, as we listen, not without fear, as to what may be on the other side of it. No one, who has once been carried over it, can come back again. There is the main-stream, the backwater and the weir, and there ends the River of Life.”

He has now been carried over the “weir,” and has seen the “other side.”

An Episode in Two Lives.

By J. LENRUP.

Author of “A BUSH-PAPERCHASE,” “IN A SUNNY LAND,” etc.

Low sandhills on the horizon where a break in the gums and peppermint-trees allowed of the horizon showing—the broad river Drake flowing between sand-girt, woody-shrubbed banks—green parrots flitting and screaming among the tree-tops—a native’s grave, a round mound garnished with cross-poles, and festooned with rags and pots whose potency kept the poor Hottentot’s dreaded spirit quiet—was the scene on which the eyes of two men, locally known as “David and Jonathan,” rested.

“And the girl waits for you—has been waiting for six years,” Jonathan said sleepily from under his lowered sun-helmet.

“Yes, bless her!” answered the six feet of lazy contentment stretched on his back beneath a great white-stemmed paper-bark. “Yes, she has waited. And a weary wait it has been to us both. When we parted in Rome six years back we had meant to have been married immediately; then came the bank crash, and every penny of mine gone. I have worked tooth and nail out here since to make a home for her. It has taken six years, old fellow, but now it is done; the farm is paying its £300 per annum, and will pay more yet. Bertie has a few thousands of her own, so we shall do first rate.”

"And you have not seen her for six years," his chum reiterated, looking at the photo in his hand—the photo of a piquante laughing-eyed brunette—"and she is content after leading a European life of frivolity to come and stagnate here for your sake. Dick, you are a lucky chap."

"I am the luckiest beggar out. Dear little Bertie. 'Whimsical Bertie,' we all called her, she was such a creature of wayward moods and fancies; yet never was there such a staunch, plucky little soul in the world—and in three months time she will be here and we shall be man and wife." The happiness of the great strong fellow—this Australian bush-farmer was as handsome, lithe and well-built as a Greek god—was too great for words; even to his Jonathan "his own familiar friend," this David could speak but little of his one holy spot. The chum handed him back the photo and looked away, but he saw that Dick kissed it before he pocketed it.

The parrots had stilled their chatter, and when the voices of the two men ceased, the intense silence of the bush-world lay around; suddenly the night wind stirred gently, the sticks and rags created and flapped on the solitary grave with an eerie sound like a moan of pain; the chum rose with a shiver.

"Why did you choose to camp beside that confounded old black's hole, Dick? it always gives me the blues. Let us get home." They got their boat, and Dick pulled slowly down the Drake in the mystic evening hour, over the quiet moon-silvered water on through the stillness, where was no sound save the swish of the oars, the occasional croak of a frog, or the plaintive cry of black-swan passing over head. Dick was not conversational; with head thrown back and dreamy eyes, he smoked his pipe and pulled his oar in silence—in thought he was standing on the sunny Roman Campagna; he was wandering in the dim old Roman Palaces, in his dream the laughing-eyed brunette stood beside him; again she kissed him under the olive and cypress trees. Looking at him Jonathan wondered whether any woman possessed a better-looking fellow for her lover! he knew too, that, exchange what she might, the brunette was not to be pitied for casting in her lot with Dick's, for he knew Dick and he loved him.

"Whimsical Bertie," with her dark eyes, and piquante small brown face under its cloud of dusky hair, was as pretty at six-and-twenty as she was when Dick Ogden had first won her girlish

fancy. She was still a creature of moods, gay in the midday sun, pensive at twilight, romantic in a ruined castle, a keen, chattering young sportswoman on a Scotch moor; wherever her roving fancy carried her, Dick's photo stood in its massive silver frame among the bric-à-brac of her dressing-table. Yet Bertie was not a young woman who wore her heart on her sleeve, she was no sentimentalist, she was the life of the various boarding-houses she frequented, the leader in fun, up to all kinds of fantastic tricks—tricks made dainty even when startling, because of her own dainty personality. Only in her sanctum would she show Dick's photo to a select company of girl friends—always a fresh set as she moved round, just as she had a fresh woolly-ball of a kitten to adore, and a fresh latest edition of the society-dog trotting at her heels—she would tell how handsome, strong and magnificent a man was her lover, in the telling she would fall in love over again with the memory of his athletic form and handsome face, and with the knowledge that he was her slave. Then she would sit down and write him a delightful, whimsical epistle, which he kissed and laughed over from one mail till the next, though he wondered vaguely how their one servant and the black gin would tend the Chippendale furniture and Crown-Derby china which the letter told him she was bringing for their bush-home. And then again he blessed the sweet plucky woman who was coming so soon, undaunted, to share a new life with the man she loved.

The English winter had turned to spring, late spring, when the young green was nearly grown up, and the strawberry-blossom carpeted the woods between the still curled-up fern fronds. Bertie had taken her passage to the Antipodes, and was making her farewells to her friends. In those last days she became even more than ordinarily changeable, now subdued and thoughtful, now in the maddest tearing spirits; in the intervals of her moods she studied Dick's photograph, and looked at her engagement ring, and drove more bargains in queer oak settles, and spindle-legged chairs.

On the other side of the world Dick worked hard at his farm; worked hard too at the wattle-paled, geranium-hedged garden. The square lawn before the low bush-house had been regularly shaved and shorn till the coarse grass had almost a semblance to the velvet sward of old England; Dick and the chum's trouser-knees bore testimony to the many hours they had spent upon it, clippers in

hand. In his few spare moments Dick read and re-read piles of creamy-tinted paper taken from an old desk in which reposed several dance-programmes, a lady's glove, with other feminine trifles—he read extracts to his chum out of some of the letters, and the chum bore it, for he was a good-natured man.

One day Dick burst into the chum's diggings in wild jubilation, holding a flimsy paper. "It is a telegram from the sweetheart to say she has sailed. She has telegraphed from Gib to say she is really on board. She will be here by the middle of next month. She leaves the 'Amazon' at Briston, and Mrs. Frazer will bring her overland to Freetown. I shall meet her there and we shall get spliced. It was thoughtful of the sweetheart to telegraph."

"It was precious extravagant," said the chum. "Oh, Dick, what a fool you are!—and how disgustingly happy you do look."

Bertie sat in the most comfortable deck-chair to be found on the 'Amazon,' placed in the most desirable spot. It appertained to her personality that she was always in the most desirable spot. Everyone on board knew her history, and how after years of waiting she was going out to wed. She felt herself to be quite the most interesting person on board, and it would have been an immense surprise to her had not every man, from the captain to the youngest officer, been her willing slave. She had them all under her whimsical rule, and they waited on her hand and foot. And ever nearer came the new land with its new life. There began to be much talk among the Australian contingent of local matters, of their farming and of their next holiday in the far years to come. Bertie yawned daintily over the price of wool, and the chance of finding gold; towards the end of the voyage she sat mostly apart, suffering from a neuralgic headache. The ship's doctor said she must be kept quiet, he pronounced her "very highly strung, a creature of nerves." Bertie was quite sure that her high-strung nerves would not stand more wool or gold, so she talked theatres and Ascot with the ship's doctor in dim quiet corners. And still the good "Amazon" steamed on towards Dick with his great eager love, and his joy that the six years of weary waiting were nigh at an end.

The long summer drought was also at an end. The red and blue kenedia bloomed and blazed, the ground round the bush farm was spangled with myriads of gay flowers, the orange tassels of the banksias hung out rampant and fiery, the air was filled with the

heavy scent of the whitened gums; as Dick rode to meet his dear one at Freetown he rejoiced in the glory of the world around him—rejoiced in it for her sake, as everything he did and thought was—it was to him as if the earth were putting on her wedding-garment to welcome home his bride.

On the wedding morn the chum turned up at the Bush-farm—he had promised Dick to keep an eye on things during his absence—he hitched up his horse and strode into Dick's sanctum, and at the door he stopped dead short, for there, seated at the table, travel-stained and haggard, sat Dick himself. He lifted his head from his arms as the chum flung into the room, to say sharply: "You need not congratulate me, Jim. The wedding has missed fire, that is all;" he paused, to continue with a lifeless laugh. "It is all over Jim! She did not come with the Frazers. They brought me her note instead; it said she had seen too much of the native Australian on board, and she found the life here would be uncongenial—"uncongenial"—that is her word. She did not land at Freetown, but went on in the "Amazon," and will go back to England in her. So I came straight back—there was not much else for me to do, was there, old fellow? I rode like the devil, and here I am. I just sat down to rest—for I am tired, Jim."

He sat staring at the chum, and the chum stood staring at him, at the dead white face with the contracted mouth and strained eyes. The chum felt he had to speak; he felt too that words were painfully lacking. "You always said she was so wayward, so whimsical, it seems she has not lost that trait then," he murmured; and then he knew that he had blundered; he moved to the window and stood looking out at the green lawn they two had tended so carefully, at the garden-seat they had knocked up for her to rest on under the sheltering acacia; the chum felt a queer choke rise in his throat, he turned and put a hand on the other man's shoulder, and said bluntly: "Old chap, I am sorry," and then he went out, shutting the door gently, and treading softly as from the chamber of the dead.

Bertie went back in the "Amazon," engaged to the ship's doctor. In three months—for he gave her no time to change her mind—they were married, and the oak settles and spindle-legged chairs adorned a Queen Anne's house in a fashionable London suburb. For the six best years of her life she had stayed in love with a

memory. She had run her course very close to the post at last, but had jibbed in the final stride from the long weary vista of colonial banishment. Had Dick but seen her and spoken with her would the old charm have returned? Would she have flung her cap over the windmill for his sake? Perhaps! who knows.

A year or so later the chum met her at a London "At Home." The brown eyes sparkled, the red lips smiled, her laughter rippled across the room. She had her little court of men—but the chum observed that her husband was not one of her courtiers.

Presently for a moment she was alone, and instantly the brunette's smile faded, her mouth drooped, and her eyes grew hard and weary. The chum noticed all this, for he was of an observant nature. He sought an introduction. She swept her skirts from the couch beside her, laughing up at him, "You are from Australia: I wonder whether you know an old friend of mine out near Freetown, Dick Ogden?"

"Yes," the chum said, leaning forward and speaking low and softly as was his manner with women. "Yes, I suppose I shall shortly hear that Dick is engaged."

"Has he fallen in love then?" The black fan fluttered, but the chum had seen the lips tighten, and the eyes grow hungry.

"Yes," he replied composedly, "I fancy so; such an awfully pretty girl, 'divinely tall and most divinely fair!' that kind, you know."

"But he was engaged before," she said, just above her breath.

"And would have married, so I have been told, had the young lady held to her bargain. But she jilted him, and between ourselves, Dick was uncommon glad. He would have married her right enough—Dick was always a gentleman—but when number one cried off Dick was not broken-hearted. You see number two had appeared then. Dick is so absurdly gone on her, and the girl adores him—a Miss Treherne, Cornish family isn't it? She has money, and Dick has made his pile too. Dick always was such a lucky beggar," added the chum, with his eyes on the ceiling, and his right hand nursing his left patent-shod-toe. "Some folks always are lucky." It was the biggest lie he had ever fabricated, but he would have fabricated a bigger to have had the gratification of seeing what he saw. He felt no compunction towards the vain scrap of humanity at his side; the long-lashed brown eyes, the faintly perfumed cloudy hair, the rounded white arm and the little hand which trembled on his coat-

sleeve as he took her out of "those horrid crowded rooms" to her carriage, appealed not to him; for he remembered the weary torn heart of him he loved, the strong noble nature soured, the man going down-hill out yonder beside the mangrove-swept Drake.

But he kept his own counsel on his return to the other side. The grass on the Bush-farm lawn waved rank and coarse, the geranium-hedge was broken, kerosene-tins tumbled round on the weedy rough paths; the chum looked at it all and sighed, and then he smiled. But David, walking beside him, knew neither the reason of sigh nor smile, for he was ignorant of the fiction which Jonathan's fancy had been so busy weaving concerning him.

A Shattered Ideal.

By HORACE WYNDHAM.

I SUPPOSE that to everyone more or less and at some time or another, the day has occurred when some hitherto cherished illusion has been shattered at one fell swoop. It is on such occasions as these, when the cup has been rudely snatched from the expectant lips—I sincerely hope that I am not dragging in an inappropriate metaphor—that one realizes to the full the hollow mockery of life.

These reflections, with many others of a similar nature, have been inspired by an event of recent occurrence. The scene was the rural district where I was then engaged in endeavouring to recruit my health; this had been seriously impaired by overwork. By the way, the doctor diagnosed my complaint rather differently, but this is a mere detail.

Oddly enough, Angelica, that is Miss Angelica Margaret Stapleton, was also staying, at the time, in the same place. Our mutual resort was a little Dorsetshire village, which was commonly described as being "fifty thousand miles from anywhere." The talented compiler of the local guide book wrote of it, as one of its many attractions, that it was a "stone's throw from the railway station." This, of course, may be as it may, but I have an ardent desire to meet the athlete who threw that stone—he must be a marvel.

Still it doesn't do to be hypercritical, and it was just the place, it seemed to me—especially as Angelica was there—for my complaint.

Now, Angelica was a very nice girl indeed—in my opinion an extremely nice girl; and I have the best of reasons for being well informed on the subject—but it cannot be denied that she had fads. Some of them were quite harmless and even praiseworthy. Under this category might be included her predilection for evening services—"vespers," she called them—and eating cold meat on Sundays, etc., but others, some of which involved active co-operation on my part with them, were apt to be rather a nuisance at times; still, one can put up with a good deal from a girl like Miss Stapleton.

Angelica's latest idea was the "Enlightenment of the Masses, with Special attention to their Spiritual Necessities." It was a somewhat ambitious scheme, perhaps, but it was one to which I was perfectly willing—and even anxious—to extend the patronage of my moral support: I hinted as much, but Angelica wasn't having any.

"You'll have to help me, Mr. Paterson, in an active manner," she said, when we were discussing the plan of campaign, over afternoon tea.

"Delighted," I murmured vaguely, wondering what I should be expected to do. Dispiriting visions of being required to kiss dirty-faced children, and presiding at Penny Readings, floated before me.

"I've had a list of all the local deserving cases from my cousin, Miss Elliot, who used to be secretary of the branch of the association down here," continued my companion. "I'm going to start to-morrow; there are several people in the village who have been recommended to me as being in need of a little serious conversation. You must come with me. You can be serious, can't you?"

Miss Stapleton always had a high opinion of my ability, although her expressions of faith were occasionally couched in rather ambiguous terms.

"As the grave," I answered, briskly. "Where do we draw the first cover?"

"I don't understand you," remarked Angelica, frigidly, "please explain."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I replied hastily, "I mean where do we start?"

"Old Widow Belcher, at Wilton, is our first case; be ready at two o'clock, please."

That afternoon Angelica, laden with an immense copy of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and I with the grave responsibility of sustaining a conversation that was to be both "serious" and "improving," set out for the residence of the relict of the late Belcher. On the way my companion entered into some explanation of the plan of campaign.

"These poor old women," she observed, "must feel so lonely, sitting all day by themselves, that I am sure they must be glad to have people come and read to them, and talk seriously about their approaching end."—I hardly thought this a particularly inspiring subject, but didn't venture to say so.—"It is so nice to think of a white-haired old woman finding consolation in reading her Bible, and preparing for the next world, that they deserve to be encouraged. She'll be glad to see us—don't you think so, Mr. Paterson?"

I acquiesced; experience has taught me that where Angelica is concerned, it is best to do so.

The widow's habitation, from the outside, at any rate, was not strikingly picturesque. But we couldn't expect too much at first, and the reputed piety of the occupant would probably more than atone for any architectural discrepancies in her surroundings.

We entered the cottage; Angelica raising her skirts to save them from contact with an extremely filthy and evil-smelling pool that occupied the doorway.

"May we come in, Mrs. Belcher?" she enquired, smilingly, as she lifted the latch.

"Yes, come in, whoever you are, and don't be all day about it, neither," was the remarkably gracious response.

This didn't strike me as being the particularly hearty welcome that I had been led to expect. However, I put it down to native reserve, and in we accordingly went.

Once inside, I looked round for the deserving old lady of venerable aspect and pious tendencies who ought to live there. The only occupant of the room, however, was a wrinkled old hag, who looked anything but pious, and was certainly badly in want of washing.

Angelica gasped.

"Are you Mrs. Belcher?" she inquired sweetly, as soon as she found her breath.

"In course I am—who did you think I was? Queen of England, perhaps? Did you bring any tea?"

"Worldly old girl, this," I reflected.

Angelica bravely tried again.

"I have brought you something that will do you more good than tea, Mrs. Belcher, I hope" she continued.

"Oh, all right; let's 'ave it then."

"It's a book, Mrs. Belcher. Perhaps you would like me to read to you for a little?"

"Yes," she assented, "you can do that if you like; perhaps I shall be able to sleep a bit." Before my companion could find a reply, the depraved old woman continued, "What book is it, miss?—something spicy, eh?"

"It's the *Pilgrim's Progress*—I am sure you will like it."

"Never 'eard on it. Ain't you got the *Family 'Erald* or the *Police Gazette*; lord love yer, there's some fine readin' there."

"What does she mean?" gasped Angelica, turning to me for support.

"Some ribald publications, no doubt," I murmured. "Hadn't you better prepare her mind first, by talking to her?"

"It's a good idea," she remarked, "I'll try. I should like to speak to you, Mrs. Belcher, before I begin reading," she said.

"All right, go ahead. I say, mister," she added, turning to me, "'ave yer got a screw o' baccy on yer?"

Before I had fully recovered from the shock of this unexpected demand, Angelica had bravely commenced the attack.

"I am sure, Mrs. Belcher," she began, "that in your declining days you must be grateful for the many mercies that Providence has granted you. How sweet you must find it, when evening comes, and your family, and your children's children gather round your knees and unite in prayer."

The old woman snorted. "Pack of troublesome little devils," she exclaimed, wrathfully.

Angelica started. I thought at first she was going to rise; but she was not that sort of girl, and always liked to see a thing through. She looked appealingly at me.

"This damp weather is no doubt very trying to you?" I cut in, as a contribution to the conversation, which now threatened to become dangerous.

"Yes, it's damned," she assented, cheerfully.

I could hardly believe my ears; I must have been mistaken.

Surely *damp* was the word she used; yet it sounded remarkably like another.

"No doubt," I continued, hastily, "you feel the infirmities of age?"

"Thank yer, mister, I'm pretty 'earty still. I could do with a pot of four-'alf, though—got any coppers about yer?"

Before I could frame a suitable reply to this astounding request, a diversion was created by the appearance in the doorway of a small, red-headed boy. The old woman saw him, and seizing a stick from the corner of the fireplace, she jumped from her chair, and hobbled across the room.

"Hi! you red-'eaded little devil," she called out, "if you show your ugly little mug 'ere again before bed-time, I'll larrup the skin off your body, see if I don't."

This was the last straw. Casting an appealing glance at Angelica, who was evidently on the verge of tears, we fled.

"O tempora, O mores, mutantur; noset mutamur in illis," I remarked, on reaching the open.

"What's that you say?" inquired my companion.

"Merely a proverb—a French one," I explained.

"Oh!" said Angelica.

I should here, perhaps, remark, that my French is distinguished from other people's—notably that of Angelica's—as being Parisian, while hers is Normandy. For this reason, my remarks are occasionally not received by her at their true value.

"Er—rather a fiasco, that little interview, wasn't it?" I ventured to observe, presently, as we walked home.

"Mr. Paterson," said Angelica, solemnly, "I don't know what to think about it. Promise me you'll never breathe a word."

I swore eternal silence.

* * * *

It was nearly a week after this little *contretemps* before I met Miss Stapleton again.

"Have you had any light on the backsliding of the widow, yet?" I asked.

For answer she put a letter into my hands. "Read this," she said; "I wrote to my cousin, asking for an explanation, and this is what she says."

This was the letter :

"MY DEAREST ANGELICA,—I am so awfully sorry about the episode of the interview. It was so silly of me not to have told you that it was Mrs. Belcher of *Witton*, and not *Wilton*, that I meant. You must have gone to the wrong place. What fun it must have been though! Fancy talking 'seriously' to Mrs. Belcher of *Wilton*! She's supposed to be an atheist, or methodist, or something horrid, and actually threw a plate at that nice curate, Mr. Jackson, when he offered to pray for her. Awfully sorry about it. Ta-ta!

Yours always,

MAY ELLIOT."

I ventured to return this epistle to the owner. "It seems we started on the wrong tack," I observed. "Better luck next time."

"I don't intend there to be any next time about it, as I shan't try again," remarked Angelica, decidedly. "Mr. Paterson," she added, "I almost believe May did it on purpose. If I was sure of it, I'd never speak to her again."

I am afraid that my countenance hardly expressed the true state of my feelings.

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded, suddenly.

"I beg your pardon—nothing at all," I exclaimed in desperation, as I nearly exploded in my attempt to control my emotions.

"You seem to be easily amused, Mr. Paterson," returned Angelica, coldly. "I was about to say that if ever you mention a word about it, I'll never speak to you again!"

I promised.

The Trials of a Reader.

By M. C. ISABEL SHERVINTON.

How many of those who profit by the labours of my profession realize the sufferings of those whose business in life it is to weed, select from and reject the multitudinous MSS. submitted to their judgment !

If say, one per cent. of the general public were compelled to take over the work of an ordinary magazine editor and his readers for one week, and to perform their duties conscientiously, our monthlies would be more intelligently appreciated than they are at present.

The worst trials to which a reader is liable to be exposed are by no means those peculiar to his official capacity. As the representative of an important periodical, his word is like the laws of the Medes and Persians to the vast number of aspiring literary lights who glimmer on the editorial horizon.

A merely cursory glance at their egregious productions is generally enough to apprise him of their value and—his natural tenderness of heart no longer vitally affecting that organ after a long course of worthless scribblers—he scruples not to consign them to the rubbish basket, or to return them to their owners with “compliments and thanks,” if stamps for that purpose have been enclosed.

This is comparatively plain sailing. He finds it harder to do his duty by the more tolerable papers that find their way into his postbox. Some of these contain sparks of such real merit amid confusion of thought and language, that he regretfully declines them, and, if his heart be not entirely fossilized and his hands not too full of work, he sometimes snatches a moment to write a few words of kindly encouragement or advice to the author.

Then again come the really excellent MSS., in some cases by unknown writers, in others signed by names of note, which for some reason may not be quite suitable to the scope or design of the publication the reader represents. An average of five-and-twenty out of every hundred may ultimately appear in the magazine. All this means hard work, short holidays, late hours, and much mental and physical strain, but it is as nothing compared to what the reader suffers unofficially at the hands of friends and acquaintances.

Now, reading a manuscript is a labour to even those fortunate beings who have plenty of time at their disposal; to the man whose business it is, the task becomes a most wearisome drudgery to which it requires an effort to bend the will out of office hours. In that office, as we have said, a bad MS. can be rejected after a glance at its contents, but in the private study this is no longer possible, if the friend who wrote it is worth retaining as a friend. However trashy his sentiment, however ungrammatical his phrases, however asinine his plot, the whole must be carefully studied by his luckless victim.

Does the reader give his candid opinion of that maiden effort? If so, he knows full well the friendship is at an end for ever. What a predicament he is in between the Scylla of hypocrisy and the Charybdis of unvarnished truth! Hear, oh sympathetic world, what my late experiences have been.

I was paying an afternoon visit to some really charming people in the neighbourhood of Bayswater, and whilst engaged in amicable conversation with the two pretty daughters of the house, in walked their father. On seeing me seated by the fireplace, he rushed forward joyfully:

"My dear fellow! delighted to see you! The very man I was wishing to run across."

Flattering, to say the least of it, from the individual one has a secret hope to some day call one's father-in-law.

He esconced himself in an armchair opposite me and proceeded to monopolize the conversation. He turned the subject several times in the direction of my work, about which I dislike being questioned. It is well to shroud the doings of an editorial staff with a cloud of mystery: it adds to the respect in which we are held.

He began to wax complimentary almost to fulsomeness, and at length asked with an air of assumed bashfulness which would have been ridiculous in his youngest daughter, if I would do him a great favour.

I of course expressed my eagerness to serve him, wondering what was coming next, as if my ten years experience of such things ought not to have prepared me! But who would have thought that vapid, elderly gentleman could cherish the aspirations of ambitious youth in his elderly breast?

It transpired after much beating about the bush that he wished me to look through, correct, and annotate some MSS. which had long

occupied his leisure hours. I expressed a sense of the honour conferred upon me, and said I would consider it a privilege to be allowed to help him in any way.

How mistaken I must have been in my estimate of his capabilities.

He proceeded to descant on the merits of the said manuscripts, and even went so far as to tell me in what way he intended to spend the cheques which should come pouring in from grateful editors. This manly confidence disarmed my last doubt. I knew him to be acquainted with some eminent writers, and supposed that he would not be so ready to enter into competition with them if he had not reasonable grounds on which to expect success. I warmly promised to do my best, and the daughters were despatched in quest of the literary treasure. They presently reappeared with a great sheaf of fluttering foolscap.

I suggested taking away only one of the MSS. presented to my shrinking vision—"that I might give more time and care to its perusal." Three of the number were solemnly selected and placed in my hands.

I said good-bye to the daughters, their father accompanied me to the hall-door, and wrung my hand, muttering something about "If ever I can do you a good turn, old chap, count on me," and I stepped out briskly towards the station with a warmer and more hopeful glow than usual at my heart.

I refrained from my usual evening relaxation of billiards, and sat down doggedly to attack the first MS.

The opening lines were a cruel blow to me. I thought for a moment that the document must be a school composition by that very backward youth, the youngest son of my late host, slipped in accidentally among his father's gems. So I turned to the second paper and applied myself to that.

Worse and worse. There had been no mistake in the first instance, for here was that misguided father's signature in full, decorating with a more curly flourish than ordinary the last page of that atrocious work of inanity. The matter was absurd: the diction would disgrace an average lad of sixteen: the style was impossible, and the writing abominably indistinct and copiously corrected in lead pencil; but I think what annoyed me most of all was the blatant vulgarity of sentiment which distinguished the whole.

The story was about three young ladies who, with the unreasonable-

ness characteristic of their sex, all fell in love with a young and handsome artist just then "the fashion," in consequence of a striking picture of his which was gracing a room in the Royal Academy. The young ladies were of a peculiar and (so far as my experience goes) unique type. They vied with each other in pursuing that unfortunate young man with a brazen effrontery which a lodging-house slavey would have blushed to emulate. They paid him the delicate compliment of gracefully handing him a large bouquet of white flowers as he was wandering through the statuary section of the Academy, and were grievously wounded because he did not look as gratified as they had hoped.

They even discussed the advisability of strewing a tribute of laurel at his feet, and the youngest and most volatile of the three made loud and flattering remarks about the suffering object of their affections whenever he happened to be near enough to hear them!

Their confidences to bosom friends about him would have estranged nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand bosom friends in the upper walks of society!

The author had a weakness for high-sounding adjectives, and, when particularly self-denying, limited himself to four at a time, and he actually contrived in one place to get nine nouns into affectionate proximity.

I had promised to do my best, and I did not shirk. I erased, corrected, re-wrote. When the first shaft of daylight crept over the top of my blind to sneer at the meretricious gas, I was finishing a civil note, in which I hinted gingerly at the truth, and coerced my conscience to forbearance. It did not take much longer to make the manuscripts into a neat roll and place the note in an envelope, and then I sallied forth to the nearest pillar-box, lest later reflection should compel me to more caustic criticism. As it was, my lack of enthusiasm was pretty certain to forfeit for me the friendship of that pleasant family near Bayswater.

I returned from the brief errand, choking with the damp and foggy atmosphere of a winter morning, and went shivering to bed for a couple of hours' uneasy sleep, during which I corrected endless manuscripts under sentence of marrying a flippant young lady (who made violent love to someone else) if I should cease for an instant from my arduous labours.

Nearly a week elapsed before any notice of my friendly efforts was

vouchsafed. Then a pink and scented envelope was put into my letter-box, enclosing a more businesslike missive and a dainty note from one of my fair friends. She apologised for the delay that had attended the delivery of the enclosure, which, she confessed, her father had entrusted to her to post some days earlier, "but she and Agnes had been so gay in consequence of a visit from a cousin in the Blues, who was taking them about to so many concerts and things (sic) that she had forgotten all her duties."

The businesslike envelope contained an immensely long letter from the aspiring literary genius, in which he thanked me for the trouble I had taken, but hotly defended his literary style. He endeavoured to show me at some length how entirely correct the construction of certain sentences had been, and how others were injured by being despoiled of half their emphatic adjectives. I was evidently wrong in having waged war against verbosity, pomposity, and all the rest. I went to my office that morning a sadder and a wiser man.

When walking down the Strand to catch my homeward 'bus, someone jostled against me, began an apology for his clumsiness, and broke off short.

"Oh, my *dear* fellow! Delighted to see you! The very man I was wishing to run across!!"—and then followed a profusion of thanks and compliments.

"My naughty little girl tells me she forgot to post a note I wrote you last week. So sorry! Awfully good of you! Come over and see us some evening soon; we'll have another talk over a pipe, and I'll give you a few more of my little works to overlook. So kind of you! Ta-ta," and he shook my hand warmly, and scrambled into the only vacant seat on the top of the omnibus I was aiming at!

Whether it was waiting in the damp for the next conveyance, whether it was reading all night with my fire out the previous week (I had felt very seedy ever since), whether it was rushing, already chilled, to the pillar-box in the early hours of the morning on that same occasion, or whether it was owing to all these things together, I do not know, but next day I was in bed with a sharp attack of pneumonia, which kept me in the house for some weary weeks, and my office work had to be done by proxy.

As soon as I was well enough to move, my doctor relentlessly ordered three months rest and a trip to the south of France.

When I returned to my old haunts late in the spring, the first

newspaper I glanced at announced the marriage on the 18th inst., in such and such a church, Bayswater, Captain So-and-So, of the — régiment—to Margaret (Maggie) daughter of—my troublesome acquaintance!

The 'naughty little girl' who forgot to post my letter for a week had become Mrs. ——— of the Blues!

My Love for Thee.

When dawning breaks 'neath sun's first beams
And linnets sing in happy dreams,
How sweet the balmy fragrance seems
Of flower and tree;
Yet, when at dawn thy gaze I greet,
Anew thy thrilling touch I meet,
For more than all, is sweet, so sweet
My love for thee!

When evening shades o'er earth repose,
And dewdrops kiss each parched rose,
Ere, wearily, their tired eyes close
O'er lawn and lea;
'Neath thy caress, night holds a bliss
Tend'rer far than dew-drops' kiss,
The sweetest song earth sings is this
"My love for thee."

As, o'er the sea the billows rise and fall
In wild unrest, to break 'neath passion's thrall
Above the deep they madly love for all
Eternity.

So is the love thou canst not yet divine
Within that half-awaken'd soul of thine,
So deep, so true, so mad is love of mine,
My love for thee!

Damocles, or the Gates of Janus.

By THEODORA CORRIE.

Author of "IN SCORN OF CONSEQUENCE," "PETRONELLA DARCY,"
"ONLY THE AVAH," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHILE Ted and Henrietta were walking along the high road to the Nutshell, the Count, left with Paul, referred again to the business which had brought him over to Godwin's Rest, his easy voice and manner proclaiming the matter beforehand to be of small importance. He drew several letters from his pocket, explaining that they were introductions to some old friends of his own in Paris, literary people. He hoped the entré to their houses might be of some slight assistance to Paul.

The latter expressed his thanks gratefully enough. This token of good-will, likely to be a valuable one, came to him at an opportune moment. Suffering to-day from a tiresome attack of neuralgia, disappointed about the loss of his manuscript, packed and ready to be off, he was in that state of passive waiting, of doing nothing in particular which overtakes most people before a journey.

He had seen a good deal of the Count during the last few days. The latter had skilfully drawn him on to talk, not about his loss, but about the second play, even winning from him an outline of the plot, and offering him a bait to finish it as soon as possible, by saying, what was perfectly true, that he could, at any rate, get it read. Never referring to the first play, he had shown so much interest in this second one, that, insensibly, he had fired Paul's own hopes about it; and then, wisely letting the subject drop, he began to discuss other matters.

This afternoon, for the first time in his life, Paul found himself talking freely about his own headaches, listening to a suggestion that he might just as well consult a French doctor about them, if they went on. One well known in Paris as a specialist where all severe forms of insomnia and neuralgia were concerned. As a young man himself, in poor circumstances, De Brie had suffered frightfully from tic, brought on by over-work, and his common-sense suggestion that neuralgia, if properly treated, was a very curable complaint, put the ailment for the first time in a new light to Paul. So far, from unconscious nervousness, he had borne his headaches as a matter of course, regarding them as an unavoidable legacy.

The Count had not been in the diplomatic service for nothing. This afternoon the nominal few minutes' talk lasted for an hour, and it was nearly six o'clock before the two walked down the road to-

gether, and finally parted company at Miss Lavender's gate, the Count promising to look Paul up in Paris before long, bidding him adieu with a cheerful bon voyage, accompanied by an unmistakably English hand-shake.

Henrietta soon made her appearance, saying that Miss Lavender would like to see Paul very much to say good-bye. Ted had only just gone, and she herself must return to Miss Swann for a few minutes. The latter was in the parlour, but too upset to see anyone this afternoon, having only just learnt from Mr. Clifford that her sister had not many days to live.

Paul went upstairs at once. Miss Lavender, lying on a couch placed in the open window of her dressing-room, greeted him with evident pleasure, but her voice scarcely rose above a whisper, and the change in her appearance struck him painfully. She asked him various questions about his play, the loss of which seemed to be a matter of real concern to her; congratulated him on his literary appointment, and then bade him sit down at her side.

"I fear you have been feeling this changeable weather," he said.

"I shall not feel anything for very long," she answered, tranquilly. "I wanted to see you to say good-bye."

Paul turned his head and glanced out of the window. The scent of flowers came in through the white curtains. The room was very sweet and cool, and Miss Lavender's own face, framed in a white net cap, looked like an epitome of peace. On a small table, under her hand, lay an open desk, emitting a faint odour of rose leaves.

"I am very pleased you could come," she went on. "I hoped I might have an opportunity of speaking to you by yourself. There is something I want you to do for me."

Paul turned and faced her. "If there is anything I can do, it shall be done, Miss Lavender."

For a moment she hesitated, looking into the steady grey eyes with a curious wistfulness in her own. "I want you," she said, slowly, "I want you to find out—indirectly, if need be—if anything is troubling Henrietta. Don't take any notice if she comes back before I can finish. No one else seems to see any change in her lately, but I am dying, and they say that sharpens one's perceptions. I am sure Henrietta is not well—I am sure of it!" she repeated. "I would not say so to anyone but you, for I fancy it is more mind than body, and I scarcely think she realises it herself. I have noticed a change in her this week. I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that something has tired her out. And it isn't all my fancy: she happened to be in the room just now when Dr. Clifford came, and he asked her if she had been ill, and what she meant by getting thinner. You know, Paul, Dr. Clifford is very clever. She just flushed up, and said 'nothing,' and went off with her head up, you know Henrietta's way; but he asked me afterwards how long she had had that cough. 'Of course, all the Godwins are as healthy as they can be,' he said, 'but if that girl were my daughter, I should make her take care of herself.' You know, Paul, Mrs. Godwin is such an invalid herself, she is rather taken up with her own symptoms," ended gentle Miss Laven-

der; "and young people get over tired, and over anxious, too, sometimes."

Here she broke off, for Henrietta came in at this moment to say good-bye, and Paul rose too. Miss Lavender took a lingering farewell of him, and he came down the stairs with an impenetrable face. Once beyond the garden, walking home, he saw the tears running down Henrietta's cheeks. He drew her hand through his arm. "All this has been too much for you."

She dashed her hand across her eyes. "Oh, no, I am glad I went. I shall be there again to-morrow. Meantime, I wish you would ask Aunt Catherine if the water-lilies are still out on the lake."

He looked at her in some wonder.

"Miss Lavender said to-day that she thought the lilies must be almost over," the girl went on. "Aunt Catherine has always sent her a bunch every year. I suppose for once it has been forgotten; and when I suggested asking for them, Miss Lavender said, in her pretty, gentle way, that she couldn't think of taking such a liberty, but her face looked so wistful, and I think if she is to have them, it had better be soon."

"You think of everything," he said. "I will tell Aunt Catherine. I can easily get them myself, if need be. I can come home by the lake."

For the next few minutes they walked side by side in silence, possibly seeing nothing but the mental picture of the little lady lying contentedly in her white-curtained room, with the rose-scented desk at her side, and the memory of the love that had waited through twenty faithful years, as if the time had been but a day.

"Few people could pity Miss Lavender," Paul said, presently. "She has never been one to think of herself. This afternoon she has been talking about you, Hetty. She thinks you have been over-tired lately, or over-anxious."

Henrietta paled suddenly, moved a little away from him, and forced a smile; but he could see that she was trembling.

He took her hand, without asking leave, and drew it back to its former resting-place. "Tell me," he said, "have you been worried, dear, about anything?"

With a sudden change of mood, with the old childish gesture, clinging and unconscious in its self-abandonment, she turned and leaned against him, so that he could not see her face. "Yes," she said, truthfully, "I have been worried rather, about several things lately; but everyone gets anxious sometimes."

"You don't think Aunt Laura is worse to-day: you are not anxious about her illness?" he asked, with an air of grave concern, that taxed Henrietta's powers of self-control badly.

"No, no!" she said, feverishly, "mamma is nearly all right again."

"You are sure," he said, with gentle persistence, "that you are not worrying about her; or is it that you are unhappy about yourself, or poor Miss Lavender?"

Henrietta's head was turned away. "I feel as if one had no right

to grieve for Miss Lavender," she said, evading a direct answer to his question, "and perhaps it is selfish, but this evening I can't help realising how much I shall think of you after you are gone—how much I shall miss you, and I don't feel as if I could bear to talk about it."

Driven thus to bay, all unwittingly, she could have chosen no more effectual way of closing his lips—of putting a stop to his dangerous questions. Involuntarily he drew the light hand on his arm closer. The minutes were racing by, he felt now almost as if he could not let her go—as if he could take the slight figure in his arms and hold it against the world. A brief madness possessed him; strong man though he was, he trembled, then very gently he let her hand fall.

By the time they had reached the avenue gates he had recovered himself, while Henrietta went back deliberately to a former topic of conversation, asking him a question with a calmness that had something mechanical in it. "Then you will get the lilies if there are any, Paul?"

"Yes," he said, with equal quietness, "I will get the lilies. Aunt Catherine asked me only yesterday if there was anything in the world Miss Lavender fancied. It must have been an oversight. I may be home late this evening, so don't let anyone wait up for me. It's just six o'clock, isn't it? So I ought to hurry."

It was growing late, but a few rosy clouds still lingered, and below shone an amber glow, where the sunset rested in golden shafts, like angels' wings aflight among the tree tops. The dusky nave of the green avenue stretched away in front towards the house, and the arch at the end was filled this evening with a transparent hanging curtain of silver mist, lovely and mysterious enough in its semi-transparency for an entrance into heaven. Despite his declaration of haste, Paul seemed to be in no hurry. Presently he said, in a low voice, "That is a picture to carry away. It looks very lovely to-night."

Henrietta steadied her voice, and answered him bravely. "It won't change," she said. "You will come back to it all, sometime, and bring your laurels with you; and when your next play is produced, we will go to Paris to see it."

He roused himself with an effort. "That's a nice prophecy. I will keep it in mind. Meantime, you are very tired. Promise me to go in and rest." Unconsciously he made use of the Count's very words.

They walked on to the end of the avenue, and there he left her, hurrying by a short cut to the house, and dressing as quickly as possible. But all through the rest of the evening he felt like a man who has heard a note of alarm sounded, yet cannot trace it to its source. Miss Lavender was right—Henrietta was not as strong as she ought to be. He had seen very little of her the last two months, purposely keeping out of her way for his own sake; and also because Ted naturally had the first claim upon her time. But this evening the thought that she might have an unshared grief came upon him like a personal reproach. The time had gone by when

Henrietta brought him her small anxieties. He had supposed that she confided them to Ted. But what if she did not? What if she were unhappy about her own state of health? Mrs. Godwin would not be likely to pay any attention to minor ailments, or major ones either, unless they were of an infectious description; and Henrietta was just the sort of girl who hated to complain. All through the evening these thoughts haunted Paul, refusing to be banished.

It was past eleven o'clock when he came home again, the bunch of water-lilies in his hand testifying to the success of his expedition. He would be off early next morning, and had already said good-bye to his father, who was sleeping at the Grange. As he came round the front of the house, making for the glass door at the side-entrance, not expecting to find anyone else up, he passed the library, which, with its French windows, opened directly upon the grass. He saw then that a light still burnt in the room, and the window was ajar. Henrietta sat at a table, busy with some mending, while Sophie, tired out possibly by the whims of her mistress, and always glad to steal half an hour with her beloved mademoiselle, was dozing in an arm-chair placed comfortably beyond the lamplight. As Paul drew nearer, his footsteps making no sound on the thick turf, he saw a pile of linen on a table in front of Henrietta, and noticed next that she was mending a hole in his glove.

The sight brought him to a standstill. Outside in the darkness he watched her at work on the homely task which looked so trivial, but which for him meant so much. How many men's hearts hold a secret room—a faithful picture gallery haunted only by one face, endlessly reproduced?

In the time to come, over and over again, Paul would see Henrietta coming to him to “get good,” or flinging her arms round his neck on the eve of school-days, crying out that she could not bear his going away. He would conjure up the figure by the chestnut tree; and again he would see her in the attic day after day helping with papers and manuscripts, copying his articles for the French journals, with eyes sometimes filled with mute wistfulness; or at the piano he would reproduce the small head, with its glory of rippling hair and the innocent, unconscious eyes—eyes to lift a man to heaven, or banish him to hell. The very fall of her simple draperies, that went so well with her lissom figure, the scent of the roses she so often wore, and all her sweet half-hidden charms would linger with him always like a strain of haunting music.

Scarcely more than a boy in years, he was no boy at heart. His work, his future career lay before him clearly mapped out. He had put his hand to the plough and could not turn back, but he knew, as he stood outside Henrietta's window to-night, knew with no possibility of self-deception, that he would be a lonely man all his life, whatever fame or useful work the coming years might bring to him.

Small blame to Paul, if secure from observation and with no thought of spying, he lingered before the fair picture, loth to break in upon it by a word.

All too soon, Henrietta came to the end of her work, but she still

held his glove in her hand, as if loth to lay it down, and the expression of pain which grew upon her face startled Paul. To-night, with her mind full of his possible future, with her whole heart troubled by the thought of the necessary deception practised upon him, who could wonder if her over-taxed powers of endurance suddenly gave way. A vain longing to give him comfort, a great wave of protecting love swept over her—love now condemned for ever to stand on one side to watch from a distance; love touched by a vague terror—that prophetic instinct too often the dower of a finely-strung nature. The deception practised upon him had been an easy one—fatally easy. What if Paul should ever suspect the part she had played—if he should ever doubt her motive or her affection. The room grew blurred before her eyes. Her head sunk lower and lower, till her cheek touched his glove and rested upon it, while from her lips stole a whisper faint as a sigh: "Paul, Paul, I love you! Forgive me. You shall never know it—never!"

And the whisper fell on Paul's ears like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. He stood while a man might count ten; then blindly turning away, he passed round the corner of the house into the cool darkness, and fell upon his face on the grass. How long he lay there he never knew.

He came back to himself at last, as a man after some terrible operation becomes conscious of agonising pain after a brief insensibility. He saw himself betrayed. His memory leaped back to Mrs. Godwin's face at the window, and to her imperative tapping fingers. He knew she had guessed his secret; but that she should have laid bare his hopeless affection to other eyes, this seemed an incredible piece of treachery. So true is it that refined, upright natures never guess at the tortuous windings of petty minds till some mischief is done past recall.

Small wonder if Henrietta's words, obscured by his own ignorance of past events, carried with them the possibility of a terribly mistaken meaning. What if she had misjudged her own heart? What if too late she had learnt to give him her affection? Vain question, since he could never attempt to find out the truth.

Again and again he said to himself that such a thing was impossible; again and again the thought remorselessly presented itself, refusing to be banished. What if it were true? The "if" maddened him, burning itself into his brain. He asked himself by what right he had made of her, till this summer, amanuensis, musician, familiar friend, twining her very life round his own in that so-called brotherly and sisterly fashion, which is so dangerous when the relationship is a fictitious one.

If Mrs. Godwin had pushed Henrietta into a pitfall by proclaiming his love, he himself had led her unconsciously along the path to its brink. He had been so sure of himself—of his own rectitude, so condemnatory of the Comte de Follet.

Now, as he thought of the past years of familiar companionship, he cursed his own blind confidence. It has been well said that a woman always knows when a man loves her. What if alone, sorrowful, struggling, Henrietta returned his affection? The very

thought struck him like the sword of an avenging angel. He must have played his own part clumsily. He had been blind, he said to himself—utterly blind. But now the veil was lifting, and the darting reality came upon him like the glare of the coming tempest. What if the seed of daily companionship had taken root, forcing its way upwards into the first shoot of a plant, unrecognised till too late. Now that it had grown, did it threaten to tear up, not only his own happiness, but the happiness of other lives along with it? Bared before his gaze, pushing the sheath from its face he seemed to see the flower of his doom.

Yet in the midst of the storm in his heart, all the training of past years joined hands now with a curious terror which shook him—terror for the very self, which had risen in revolt. Is destiny stronger than mortals? he thought, drearily. And what had blind fate done to tie his hand thus?

Alas, for that word!—fate, destiny, doom—call it what one will. Linking it to so-called force of circumstances, and starting the whole sailing on the deep current of man's inherited temperament, the devil fashioned that deceiving phantom of a figure long ago, and beneath its garments he still hides the heart's desire of half the world. And Paul, deluded by his own misapprehension, had caught a glimpse of love, not in the guise of a calm sisterly affection, but love robed by Eros himself.

In answer to this astounding possibility, far down in the recesses of his own consciousness, beat for beat, throb for throb, he pictured Henrietta's heart—pictured it as the reflection of his own. Before this one supreme possibility, all the foundations laid in his youth tottered. Across the cold ashes of his sacrifice there swept a sudden tornado. Passion woke at last, and a fire like the flames of Etna swept all before it. Must Henrietta's happiness—her very life—weigh for nothing in the scale? Could he let her go without speaking a word of mutual understanding—of sympathy or comfort? Then a mocking voice whispered to him, "So had the Comte de Follet fallen."

There are moments when fate rises up fierce, relentless, compelling in its attitude, as a foregone conclusion. Such a moment Paul knew now. But as he lay there, with his brain on fire and his heart torn by a thousand conflicting emotions, out of the semi-darkness a face gradually formed itself, bearing a strange likeness to his own. Slowly it came nearer to him, and he knew it for the face of his grandfather. Chilling his mad passion as ice chills fire, it passed him by.

The horror of it all seemed to be behind him, only hiding for a minute out of sight. He turned his head, and started to his feet, putting out both hands, as if to ward off something evil; and even as he moved, the face vanished. Called up probably by his own over-excited brain, the vision had done its work with cruel swiftness. For one moment even Henrietta's image vanished from his mind; but now the thought of her rushed back upon him with a crushing sense of responsibility—almost of premeditated guilt. Before that ghost of the past he stood arraigned

and condemned, and his whole mental attitude changed its standpoint.

In his childish days, deep rooted in his inner consciousness, his grandfather's figure always stood as the janitor of a mental torture chamber, bringing in its train the shadow of a horror, before which love fled away trembling, as if before a curse. Drearily, the old words uttered long ago came back to his lips : "I have seen a spirit, and I have sworn a vow."

His brief madness was over. Alone, with the quiet empty space in front of him, the tension left his figure. Gradually his thoughts became calmer and more connected. He thought of the outcome of Madame de Follet's marriage. Forty years spent at La Navette, and a look in her quiet grey eyes which he himself could never forget.

There was nothing melodramatic in his nature. Possessing a code of honour far apart from the bounds of a weak or wicked sentimentality, he would never be likely to tamper with a moral difficulty through moods of lengthy vacillation. His vices, like his virtues, were not moulded on a petty scale. Had he gone over the precipice that lay at his feet, he would have fallen with his eyes open. Like scores of other men—England gives us many such—he was only a simple gentleman, with no possible thought of treachery in his mind towards Ted Lisle. All the same, he suffered horribly. More forcibly than ever there came home to him to-night that strange, fettering consciousness of the claims of the past—claims which rush in upon some of us like the sudden opening of a secret door in the mind, or the recognition of another person's bad debts, for which our own life stands forfeit, pledged beforehand as an unconscious I. O. U.

Even had Henrietta been free, the misery of his grandfather's life and the knowledge of the hereditary taint in the De Follet family, left before him no excuse save those of the devil's own making. He had seen the whole play played out once, and now fate, with that strange and terrible irony peculiarly manifested in some families, seemed to be trying to reproduce the same tragedy, while he realised only too clearly that he himself had become responsible for the direction of the play—that he stood inviolably pledged to change its finale.

"If she has fathomed my secret," he thought, "at least, she need never suspect that I have guessed hers. Her belief that I know nothing erects a barrier between us impassable to such a nature as Henrietta's. Once let her find out the truth, once let me stamp it with spoken words, and then heaven help us both. Life will go harder with her than for most people, but, so far, her future happiness is in safe hands. Honour, obligation and friendship tie her to Ted : she loves him better than she guesses. Her feeling for me is half pity—the pity of a young and generous nature—and she is so young yet. If I go now, time will soften all things ; the past will be swallowed up in the present. If Ted's devotion is a matter of course to her now, it will not always be so. When one is young, six months is a long time before a wedding. If only she is happy.

She must be; she will be happy in the end—but not if I stayed here to play the part of a coward. Unless I have made a mistake.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PAUL entered the breakfast-room next morning at an early hour, to find Henrietta down before him.

Jeremiah hovered in the background with a dejected air. Was not Paul going to live among frog-eating Frenchmen, and who could say when he would come back? The whole county might have listened to the conversation that went on at the breakfast table. Yet all the time while the old familiar surface of things remained unchanged an underlying difference might have been felt, the difference between two onlookers on a quiet shore, and the same pair of people struggling in the waves.

Breakfast over—the meal had been a merely nominal one—Henrietta fetched her hat and prepared to accompany Paul to the top of the garden. His luggage had gone off on the previous evening. He himself would walk through the fields at the back of the house, and take a short cut to the railway station.

Dull and grey, the morning did not look promising. Rain clouds hung low on a misty world, and through the tree-tops a strong wind rushed like a giant at play, tossing the boughs together in wild sport, while softly between every gust the whispering ghost of an afterwind followed, like the vanishing spirit of summer. Almost in silence the two walked through the garden, while the nightmare at Paul's heart increased, bringing with it a feeling of nightmare.

At the top of the garden under the Dryad's oak he came suddenly to a halt. They stood there under the trees facing each other. The giant dragon-flies were flitting to and fro from light to shadow, seeming to Henrietta like the shuttle of fate. One misty sunbeam struggling through a cloud fell on Paul's hand, out of sight a mistle thrush sang loudly through the stillness. Paul spoke first. "I cannot let you come any further, Hetty, you ought not to be out in this mist."

Henrietta moved her head restlessly. "You will write to me often Paul. You will tell me all about yourself and your work, about everything?"

"Yes," he said steadily. "I will write. It's always a wrench going away. But I am very glad I am to settle in Paris to be within easy reach of my grandmother. If you could see her, Hetty, you would better understand her loneliness."

"Perhaps I do understand," she said with a catch in her voice. The very fact of his seemingly calm acquiescence raising a revolt in her heart. "It seems to me it is always the strong who suffer for the weak, the innocent who pay the penalty for the guilty. I can understand that your grandmother's life will be a great deal brighter. But your own life, have you ever thought of that?"

"My own life," he said quietly. "I am very well content with it. Once let my first play turn up and the second get finished. Once let me buckle to work, and few men will have less cause to grumble than myself. I can see that you don't half believe in me, Hetty." Perhaps he saw too that her face whitened: that his resolutely cheerful and matter-of-fact attitude struck on her overstrung nerves like the lash of a whip, for when he went on speaking his voice grew lower. "I may be an indefinite time abroad," he said. "When once I am settled to work I shall not get a holiday easily. It is not likely that I shall be able to return for your wedding. But I shall want to hear of you all, and some day you will write to tell me of your happiness and of Ted's?"

This request demanded a promise that set the seal to Henrietta's suffering. But pain was not the sole feeling at work within her heart. It only represented a straw on the current of her emotion. Banished with Ted to her own particular Eden, she seemed to see Paul abandoned and alone, pushing his own frail skiff without a chart into the heart of a storm, unconscious of the rocks on which he might founder.

In the midst of her anguish she looked up, the colour deepening in her cheeks, rendering her loveliness perilously brilliant. Pent up, forcibly held in check, restrained all these weeks, unknown to herself her vast pity had been gathering its forces like the waters of a dam, threatening to burst their barriers.

Rising every moment higher they now pitted themselves against the one influence, Paul's own resignation, which had hitherto sufficed to keep them in check. For his sake only because he was so resigned, and for no other reason; from her very soul, young, pitiful and loving, there sprang at this moment the note of revolt.

"My happiness," she said, "my happiness! Paul, Paul, will you never want anything for yourself?"

The words came to him like a cry from his own rejected hopes, beating against the gate which was closing fast between them. Looking up at him, it did not seem possible that she could turn away her eyes till she had received an answer. Before that look Paul trembled, yet he answered her with scarcely a perceptible hesitation. "I want a good deal. I want to be true to myself, Hetty. Whatever comes, nothing else in the world matters, if one is only true. And it is very natural that I should go back often to La Navette gladly, of my own free will. You must not let my life cast a shadow upon yours. You must not pity me; there is no need for that. And you will be happy too, for my sake as well as for your own, Hetty. *In the years to come the knowledge of your happiness will be my consolation.* I want you always to remember that. And, more than anything else, I want your promise; because I know you can give it me."

Not daring to speak more explicitly, with a yearning tenderness in his voice that was almost prophetic, he leant forward and took her hand in his, looking down for the last time at the fair face, the tremulous lips, the pathetic innocent eyes as if he would imprint he features for ever on his memory.

A great agony swept over Henrietta. With her hands in his her whole life seemed to be held in a furnace. In the crucible of pain the very foundations of her nature broke up, changed and took fresh shape. For his sake, and his only, the revolt and despair at her heart had risen; for his and his only it died out now. That old pagan revolt against suffering; that yearning after happiness: not for ourselves, but for those we love. A yearning necessarily abandoned by poor human nature time after time, though never without a sense of personal crucifixion. To-day born afresh in pain, Henrietta stood trembling, realising as De Brie had said that she could play providence no longer, that she must let him go without a word of warning. Every possible precaution had been taken, but an instinctive sense of failure lurked in the background. And all the time Paul stood waiting, looking down at her.

Answering him at last, her voice scarcely rose above a whisper: "Yes, I promise," she said, "I will write, some times; and I will tell you of Ted's happiness, and of my own: but not just yet, Paul, not just yet."

With a silent gesture of farewell he turned away, and disappeared into the pine wood. Out there among the thick trees for the first time in his brave life he broke down. Irrepressible sobs shook him from head to foot. He asked himself without hope of an answer if he had indeed murdered her happiness. As a dying man may remember bygone days there flashed back upon him a vision of the beach at La Navette: of his childhood's home. To his overwrought fancy every familiar object looked dim and unreal. The first mists of autumn rising from the river helped on the illusion. Once more the whole scene of his life changed and shifted. He fancied he could hear Madame de Follet's voice, and the very words of his childhood rose to his lips. "It was too cruel, and I said, poor fool that I was, I said—I would have spared her if I could."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN Henrietta came to Mrs. Godwin's room two hours later her pale face and heavy eyes for once attracted instant notice.

"Why, my dear, what have you been doing to yourself? You look like a Burne Jones or one of those esthetic sort of people—so dreadfully white and melancholy."

"Do I, mamma," said Henrietta quietly. "I think I have taken a chill, I have been feeling very poorly all night."

She stood for a moment hesitating, then said: "I have news about Miss Lavender this morning. I have been up there." Mrs. Godwin looked vexed.

"Really I shall have to put a stop to your visits. You are wearing yourself out dancing attendance on sick people."

Henrietta sighed: "I shall never do anything more for Miss Lavender."

"What do you mean?" said her mother, startled.

"It is all over, mamma. She died at eight o'clock this morning."

"I had no idea the end was so near," said Mrs. Godwin, "though I always knew she had little power of bearing up. Poor thing, poor thing, at eight o'clock did you say?"

"Yes, mamma," said Henrietta in a subdued voice. "I was there."

"My dear how dreadful, you don't mean that you were in the room, surely?"

"Yes, but it wasn't at all dreadful, mamma. Miss Swann told me Miss Lavender had been taken worse last night. She could not swallow food, and her voice had gone. Miss Swann was not sure if she would know me, but I took the lilies up just for the chance, and put one in her hand. I am sure she knew me then, for she smiled. Miss Swann and I were both there. Presently she seemed to be dozing. At last as I was turning away to go, I thought I heard her give a faint call. But she was not calling for me," the girl ended softly. "She just held out both hands and said: 'Yes, Maurice, I am coming.' And then it was all over in a minute."

Mrs. Godwin shivered again. "It must have been a great shock. I don't wonder you look pale, you had better have some of my red lavender."

Henrietta swallowed the drops obediently, then walked to the window, and stood there twisting a ring gently round and round upon her finger. The sparkle of the stones, a hoop of sapphires caught Mrs. Godwin's eye. "Where did you get that, Henrietta?"

"Miss Lavender wished me to have it, mamma. I did not want to take it, but they both wished it. Miss Swann's fingers are too large and she didn't want the stones reset or altered."

"Its almost too handsome for a young girl," said her mother, "except of course Ted will be giving you plenty more now, and in your position you can wear more jewellery than other girls."

Henrietta looked down at the blue sapphires in silence, touching them much as she would have touched a beautiful flower, conscious with Seanacour of the melody that can be found in colour as well as in sound. But at this moment a paroxysm of coughing of such a violent kind took her, that it fairly startled Mrs. Godwin.

"I can't have you getting up at these unreasonable hours, and going out before breakfast," she said fretfully. "You look as if you had taken a chill somehow. What have you been doing that is imprudent I wonder?"

"I have only been to the Nutshell and to the top of the garden this morning," Henrietta answered listlessly.

"You didn't get up to give Paul his breakfast did you?"

Henrietta turned her face a little away. "Yes, mamma, I did." She shivered as she spoke, and put up one hand to her head.

Mrs. Godwin watched her more conscious of vexation than of any other emotion. "You had better go to bed at once, and have some hot tea. I will send Sophie up to you." And to this proposition Henrietta made no demur. She would go and lie down: she thought she had a cold coming, but there was nothing to worry about—nothing much amiss with her.

Dr. Clifford scarcely would have endorsed this assertion. After receiving a morning visit from Ted, he paid an earlier call than usual on Mrs. Godwin that day, and having given her vanishing aches and pains sufficient attention, he next enquired for Henrietta.

"The child has a little cold," Mrs. Godwin said. "I think perhaps you had better take a look at her. You will find Sophie upstairs. You might tell her to come to me when you go, I am scarcely equal to looking after myself at present."

"Your daughter has had a cold hanging about her for some days hasn't she?" Dr. Clifford asked.

"She has a tiresome cough, Dr. Clifford; and is really very thoughtless about it. She never takes proper care of herself."

"It's about time someone else took it for her, isn't it?" said the old doctor bluntly. "I will come back and tell you what I think of her presently." So saying he shut the door behind him firmly, oblivious of his patient's raised eyebrows.

Sophie, whom he encountered in the corridor, greeted him with an air of relief and led the way to Henrietta's room. Mademoiselle she declared to be very poorly—Mademoiselle had looked ailing for the past week.

The doctor's keen glance softened wonderfully as he looked at his fresh patient. The two were old friends, yet Henrietta greeted him with a startled, almost dismayed air. Her eyes were bright with fever, and her unbound hair lay tossed over the back of the pillow. Inwardly noting afresh the delicacy of her whole appearance, he sat down at the bedside. "How long have you had that cough?" he asked.

"Only a day or two I shall be up again to-morrow."

Dr. Clifford shook his head. "You are going to remain just where you are. You don't want to give anyone else the influenza."

Henrietta still looked at him with troubled eyes. "Do you think I shall have it badly?" she asked. "Do you think I am likely to be lightheaded?"

"Certainly not if you are a tractable patient and keep quiet," he answered soothingly, wondering at her question, yet careful not to show any surprise.

The girl moved her head restlessly on the pillow. "If I get worse, let Sophie nurse me, no one else."

"Sophie shall look after you," he said quietly. "You couldn't have a better nurse. Just keep still and we will have you about again in no time. You oughtn't to have gone out this morning. You must be more careful of yourself."

Henrietta's lips quivered. "I didn't think about it. I wanted to see dear Miss Lavender."

He looked at her very kindly. "Yes, yes, I know all about it. I have just come from Miss Swann. I don't know what she would have done without you; but now it is your turn to be taken care of." He felt her pulse again; advised her to get to sleep if she could; wrote a simple fever mixture, and then went back to Mrs. Godwin. The latter received his report coldly. Her fears, if she had any, were not speedily roused, but Ted, who had ridden over, and who followed

the doctor to the doorstep, was not so easily satisfied. "Is there anything much amiss, Clifford," he asked.

"If you take Mrs. Godwin's opinion there's nothing the matter, but thoughtlessness and an ordinary cold," said Dr. Clifford drily. "If you ask me for mine I should say there is a good deal of low fever hanging about Miss Godwin. Judging by her pulse she has been doing too much; its low and irritable, not at all what it ought to be. I think, too, Miss Lavender's death has upset her. Miss Swann tells me she was there this morning; and death is always a shock when seen for the first time. I shall look in again to-morrow. Yes, yes, she has a good constitution," he added rather hastily, "very good, but I fancy she has been asking too much of it lately. Young things presume too much upon their own strength sometimes; with her mother on the sofa I can fancy there is a good deal to see to in this house."

Ted's down-drooped lid hid something very like a flash of passionate anger, not for the doctor but for someone else. Yet he stood there very quietly: flicking the toe of his boot with his riding whip, "Gunn will be down next week, if you think a consultation advisable," he said presently.

But Dr. Clifford negated this proposal chiefly for the sake of his patient. "We might alarm her unnecessarily, there is nothing much amiss. The change abroad ought to set her up again. I suppose before long you will be going yourself?" He made the remark more as an assertion than as a question. Few men, however well they knew Ted, ever seemed inclined to question him.

"We are all going together," Ted answered. "On the first if possible. I hope to persuade Mrs. Godwin to remain my guest at San Rimini till after my own wedding."

He spoke very quietly, but Dr. Clifford's face lit up with a sudden expression of shrewd satisfaction. "It's about time someone stayed in the house who has the right to look after her," he said bluntly. "She never thinks of herself."

The eyes of the two men met. They understood each other well enough, with that complete sense of good fellowship brought about by constant intercourse during prolonged sickness.

"Sophie is a good nurse," said Ted slowly. "I am sure that Mrs. Godwin is not strong enough yet to have charge of anyone."

"No," answered the other with a touch of dry humour in his voice, "I shall not allow her to do any stairs for a day or two."

Ted held out his hand. "How soon do you think Henrietta will be about again?"

Dr. Clifford's eyes twinkled. "By the end of the week, I hope, if she is not worried." With which hopeful remark he took himself off.

But Henrietta was not about again by the end of the week. The fever came back persistently every second day, causing Dr. Clifford some anxiety.

The illness seemed to have taken hold of her with unaccountable suddenness and swiftness, yet perhaps not altogether suddenly, the old doctor reflected. Her hand had been hot last week at the Nut-

shell, though the suggestion that something must be amiss had not been a welcome one.

This was just the trouble with Henrietta, a fault never to be found in her mother. Hetty never lodged a complaint of any kind. One might almost have fancied that she felt ashamed of being ill.

Lying very quietly in the old four-post bedstead, suffering from the reaction following a great strain; in the weakness of fever and broken nights, a letter from De Brie at the end of the week, in a parcel of books, somewhat cheered her spirits. He said that an old and trusted friend of his own, a literary man, formerly a clever doctor, to whom the history of the De Follet family was well known, had promised to keep an eye upon Paul. A letter of introduction had already made the two known to each other, not as patient and physician, but from the standpoint of bibliomania.

Privately counselled by De Brie, Henrietta had said nothing to her uncle about Paul's sad lapse of memory, or of her own subsequent proceedings. Over anxious at all times from affection, Godwin had worries enough at the present moment without their being added to. Once informed, he would, so the Count feared, be certain to urge Paul to abandon a literary career, but any argument would only be doomed to failure beforehand, unless backed by an explanation, and the result of such a communication Henrietta could not bring herself to contemplate.

For the present there was nothing more to be done, and the girl tried to hope for the best while her feverish attack ran its course. Thanks to keeping absolutely quiet, she was able to be moved to the sofa in her own room at the end of ten days, receiving strict injunctions to stay there. On the afternoon of this particular day, Mrs. Godwin actually mounted the stairs, coming in with a news-bringing air. Anxiety to see De Brie, whose visits she had sorely missed, had brought about her speedy convalescence. To-day, though she still posed as an invalid, her manner betrayed an unusual amount of energy.

"A letter from May," she said, tossing a thin, foreign envelope into Henrietta's lap. "Everyone gets news but myself. Your uncle has a letter from Paul. He says the doctor thinks very badly of Madame de Follet. It is doubtful if her strength will last another winter. I am sure I can't imagine why she has gone on existing all this time. Anyone with a sensitive nature like mine would have been dead at that place in a year or two." Her manner implied that every De Follet with any sense of propriety, should have taken themselves to another part of the world at the earliest date possible. "You will see," she went on, "that his grandmother's death won't make any difference to Paul's plans. He will settle in Paris altogether; I am convinced of that, he will never come back here again."

"Do you think so?" said Henrietta, wondering at the unmoved sound of her own voice.

"Why, yes of course I do, my dear. I always thought Paul was shallow. After your father giving him an university education, and after my being always like his own mother, I must say that it will seem a little heartless and ungrateful, this complete turning of him-

self into a Frenchman again, and settling down away from us for good and all." Having located Paul imaginatively for ever in Paris, she went on to blame him with the same facility. "I think," she said, "that he might have written to me, or to you, as well as to your uncle, But I have always known his fondness for this place to be half assumed. He has been a foreigner at heart. Future events will bear me out, and some day you will say that I am right." She ended with that air of superior intelligence always so exasperating to a listener.

"I think," said Henrietta, with a touch of indignation in her sweet voice, "I think that Paul is loyalty itself."

"Oh, I know Paul is quite perfect in your eyes," said Mrs. Godwin, with a slight air of displeasure. "But really it doesn't much matter. He is gone away, and we shall see very little or nothing of him in the future. I didn't come to you to argue about his possible depth or shallowness. I thought you would like to know that Ted is here, and has brought some news. He says that Aunt Catherine is off to Paris in a few days' time, and Evelyn is going with her."

"Is Aunt Catherine really fit to travel, mamma?"

"I suppose she is the best judge of that," said her mother, carelessly. "She has cried wolf so often, that it is hard to believe in her ailments. But Dr. Clifford wants to have a consultation before she goes away; and Sir William Gunn is coming down to-morrow, though she is set on seeing some old doctor in Paris as well, someone who attended her before. I suppose there must be something really wrong the matter, or they wouldn't have Gunn down from London. I should say myself, that travelling was very bad for her, and by this time I ought to know something about sickness."

"Is Ted going to Paris, too?" Henrietta asked.

"Certainly not. Really, my dear, you might rouse yourself a little, considering that we shall be off ourselves so soon. Ted means to travel with us, and he has been saying to-day that he hopes we shall stop on our way and be his guests for a week or two at San Rimini, before I settle about my own house."

"Shall you let it, mamma?"

"I don't know," said her mother, with a touch of indecision in her voice. "I can tell better when I get out there. Your Cousin Armand wants me to see his improvements, and his lease isn't up for a few weeks."

"Cousin Armand is making a long stay here," said Henrietta, innocently.

An expression of complacent satisfaction came into Mrs. Godwin's face. "Yes," she said, "he is; he is coming over later on. Really, Henrietta, I think it couldn't hurt you to come downstairs for half an hour this afternoon. I know Ted is most anxious to see you. He has brought you some lovely flowers. You had better go yourself, and tell him how you are. You have quite a nice colour to-day; you are much more fit to be about than I am."

Henrietta looked conscience-stricken. "I thought Dr. Clifford said something about my coming down next week."

"My dear child," said her mother, impatiently, "I am sure I

understand you and your constitution better than Dr. Clifford does. You will never gain strength if you are so fanciful, and stay in one room all the time. There is a nice fire in my boudoir, and you can come up again before tea time if you like; you needn't see Armand. I think you owe something to Ted's anxiety. I never knew anything like the young men of the present day, they think everything can be arranged in no time. I wonder what you would say to me if I told you that Ted has been suggesting that your wedding might take place before we leave Godwin's Rest."

The colour rushed to Henrietta's face. "Mamma!"

"Just so," said her mother, smiling. "No trousseau, and a-hole-and-corner-affair, no, no! I told Ted I couldn't think of such a thing. After we get out there it will be another thing; he must look after you then."

"But I don't understand," said Henrietta, troubled at this sudden and unexpected suggestion. "I thought you wished me to wait till next spring, mamma?"

"Oh, I don't know about that," said her mother; something seemed to have put her into a good temper again. "After we leave San Rimini, you could be married from Palermo quite well. It would be a really poetical affair, and Solway could come over for it in the yacht. And Ted could take the Marchesi palace close by for the rest of the winter, after your little honeymoon, and I could be with you a great deal, entirely, if you didn't find me *de trop*."

After a daily talk with Ted, she had begun to see that perhaps after all it would be as well to establish herself firmly in the bride's house for some months before a start was made in the spring for England.

Nothing would have induced her to consent to Ted's other suggestion, that the wedding might take place before leaving Godwin's Rest. Once abroad with a docile daughter she had small fear of a prolonged separation. So far, Ted had never actively crossed her wishes, and fortunately for her own peace of mind it had not occurred to her that his very quiet manner hid a reserve of strength behind it. He was passionately attached to Henrietta; the latter's slightest wish he had so far scrupulously carried out: it should not be difficult to obtain a continuance of the very natural arrangement that mother and daughter should continue to see a great deal of each other.

Henrietta lay very still while the colour came and went in her cheeks. Mrs. Godwin picked up a scent bottle.

"Now, my dear child, don't look so taken aback. You know your happiness is my first consideration, and we both owe something to Ted. I never knew a man more devoted than he is. He has come over twice most days, and really, the rides and thinking about you so much seem to have taken him quite out of himself. He looks almost robust. He is waiting downstairs now."

Henrietta's fingers played tremulously with the fringe of a white shawl. "Mamma," she said again, with some difficulty, "did Ted ask you to tell me this?"

"What a foolish child you are," said her mother, smiling. "He would be very cross if he knew I had said anything to you about it, so

you must on no account betray me. I daresay he won't refer to the matter again." She put some lavender water on a handkerchief and passed it over Henrietta's brow, saying, a little irritably, "There is no need for you to be upset. You can quite understand what an anxiety you have been to myself and Ted lately. He has been talking about you half the afternoon. He particularly begged me to say nothing about this new idea. I suppose he wanted to ask you about it himself, but I was not going to be dictated to. You can appear as reluctant as you like when you go downstairs. I am quite willing he should have the credit of persuading you. But remember one thing, I will not have your marriage take place before we leave England." She laid down the scent bottle, and going to the dressing-room door, summoned Sophie. "Mademoiselle is going downstairs," she said, "you had better give her an arm."

But Sophie stood stolidly still in the doorway. "Milord is just gone," she said; "M. le Comte has arrived, and awaits madam in the small boudoir."

Mrs. Godwin stood hesitating, while skilful fingers touched her hair and dress. "If Ted has gone," she said at last, "perhaps you had better stay here to-day; but to-morrow, you really must make an effort, if only to please me." Then kissing Henrietta on both cheeks, she left the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHILE Mrs. Godwin was sitting with Henrietta, John started off to pay what had become a daily visit to the Grange.

The Duchess greeted him with more warmth of manner than she usually showed to anyone, enquiring if he had met Armand de Brie on the road.

"I met him on the stairs," John answered. "He is going over to Godwin's Rest by and by, after tea, I think he said."

"It's a pity you two can't change places for good," she suggested. "It would save time and trouble."

John, scarcely heeding this speech, sat down in the nearest chair, with the air of a man who had only one thought in his mind.

"What did Gunn say to you to-day, Aunt Catherine. I hear he has been and gone."

She drew her lace shawl a little closer. "He told me what I have just told Armand, that I may live another twenty years—thirty, possibly, if I follow his advice."

John's face flushed, his lips opened impulsively, but she interrupted him.

"There, I know what you would say. I wouldn't believe it of anyone else."

"I think you might believe it of most people," he said, heartily.

She looked at him with a half ironical smile, half affectionate. "Laura, no doubt, will be delighted. I wonder what she will say

to Armand during the next half-hour or so, or rather, what he will say to her?"

"What should he say?" John asked, a little uncomfortably.

"Nothing, if he is a wise man. Have you ever read Longfellow's prose works, John?"

He shook his head.

"Poverty is not a crime," she quoted, with a note of regret in her voice, "poverty is not a crime—but something worse, as Dufresny said, when he married his laundress because he couldn't pay her washing bill."

"What do you mean?" he asked. But all the time he knew what she meant.

"I mean that Armand is illogically fond of his garden. He seems willing to pay as large a price for it as Eve paid for a few mouthfuls of fruit. He must please himself. Unfortunately, I have eyes, but I can't interfere. He left me in very good spirits. I didn't tell him or Evelyn all Gunn said to me. Why should I? A part is often better than the whole."

"What did he say to you?" His face betrayed sudden anxiety. His was a simple nature. He had never been in the diplomatic service.

"He wrote me a prescription," she said, "He gave me, as I told you, a possible twenty years, if I followed his advice."

"And his advice?"

"It includes severe treatment," she answered, quietly. "I had a friend once who died under it. She went through the same thing, and she suffered. I don't like to think of it now. I hear surgery has made great strides in the last twenty years. One can be taken to pieces and put up again like a puzzle—more easily, in fact, not taking nerves into account. I have a good constitution—magnificent, Gunn calls it. And the percentage of deaths now is one to thirty. One can't help liking the man; he is very hopeful. It seemed to give him real satisfaction, this idea that I should live to be ninety."

For a minute there was silence in the room; then John laid his hand on hers. "You will make up your mind to it for all our sakes?" he said, a little huskily.

"Why should I?" she asked, still in the same indifferent voice. "What have I to live for? To go through the inferno at sixty, for what? For the satisfaction of seeing you a poor man for another twenty years. Oh, yes, I know what you would say"—the look on John's face warning her that she had gone too far—"I know all you would urge. You are a good-hearted man, Jack; you always were, and a sad fool, too."

"For all our sakes, can't you make up your mind?" John said again. "Aunt Catherine, I would do anything—anything I could to help you."

"Oh, no you wouldn't," she answered, with conviction. "There are two things which might make a great deal of difference, but I have given up expecting them."

"If they are possible things, I will do them, Aunt Catherine." He

spoke slowly, as if weighing his words, his ruddy face paler than usual, and the lines of his mouth showing something more than hurt feeling.

"It's ill waiting for a dead woman's shoes," she said. "I am sorely tempted to kick mine off. But if you would take now what you have refused once, the half of the yearly income derived from the Godwin money—it has been accumulating for the last twenty years—then my life might be better worth living."

For a minute John looked at her with a curious expression seldom seen on his face since he had been a schoolboy—an expression which had somehow made its way into her heart. "Aunt Kitty," he said, using an old nickname not heard for thirty years, "I will do just whatever you wish."

The long fingers under the lace shawl twitched, the line of the lips gave way a little. "You are a good boy," she said; "but it isn't enough."

"What is the other thing that you want?" he asked, with wonderful gentleness, considering that he had just allowed himself to be beaten on his own ground.

Her fingers twitched again, a slight colour rose in the pale cheek. "I am afraid it's too late to get it by twenty years, John."

"Tell me," he persisted.

She looked straight at him. This direct gaze, always a part of herself, disconcerted many people. Whatever Catherine Harebrook had to say, she had never been known to look out of window, though her own hazel eyes betrayed just as much or as little as their owner chose.

"If you had asked Evelyn to marry you twenty years ago," she said, slowly, "her life and yours and mine might possibly have been different. The matter seems to be ended. Neither then nor since has she ever discussed it."

John got up suddenly, and walked to the window.

"I suppose you don't know," the quiet voice went on, "that Evelyn is only my tenant at the Chase. She sold me the property some time ago. I wished to get it back, and she—well, she was tired of the Chase, I believe. She will never re-build the house. Her lease is up this autumn."

"I had no idea of this," said John, in a low voice.

"She has taken very good care that you shouldn't have. Pride and poverty are false gods, John—very unsatisfactory ones. You have served them wonderfully well, but I don't see quite where the returns come in."

John made no answer. There was a certain rigidity about his figure, which the tired eyes watching him could not fail to notice.

"When she was only seventeen," the old lady went on, "there was a time when I hoped you would be my son in reality. Now, as I said before, I should imagine you to be twenty years too late. I am all in the dark as to your feelings. And Evelyn has never once referred to her own, or I should not be discussing her at this minute," she added.

There was no bitterness now in her voice, only a great weariness. In the midst of a confusion of other thoughts, it flashed upon John that this unspoken project must have lain all these years very close to her heart.

"When the crash came, two and twenty years ago; when you wanted to pull me out of the mire, I was a fool," he said, a little unsteadily. "It seems to me I have been a fool all along, Aunt Kitty. But if I missed understanding her then, how could I speak now? To presuppose my silence has hurt her, to ask her to forgive me, would be to offer her an insult. Yet, if she only knew it, my life has been no bed of roses. I have loved her all the time. I shall always love her. But I am nothing to Evelyn—less than nothing. I have earned her contempt long ago."

All the warm emotion, all the self-repression of years broke out now in his unchecked utterance. A sudden sound, suspiciously like a faint, startled exclamation, brought him round from the window, as if he had been shot. The dressing-room door, already half open, had been pushed wider, and Evelyn stood on the threshold, carrying a small, daintily-spread tray.

Apparently unconscious of the electrical state of the atmosphere, she greeted John with a smile, excusing herself from shaking hands. Arranging the tray apparently took her some time, while for once he offered no assistance.

"Mamma," she said, "I have brought you some cocoa. You look tired. You mustn't talk any more. I am going to give John some tea in the boudoir while I have my own."

Holding doors open with mechanical politeness, unable all at once to recover his lost self-command, he followed her downstairs. In former days, Evelyn had often made tea for him in the boudoir. This afternoon the very look of the room, with its stand of white geraniums in bloom in the window (always her favourite flower, and always grown in abundance), helped to carry him back to the suddenly-buried past, which, in the last few minutes, had come to life again.

Without noticing his unusual silence, seeming perfectly at her ease, Evelyn sat down opposite the tea-tray, and picked up a tiny rat-tailed spoon. With a curious sense of unreality, he watched her measuring out the tea, and from mere force of habit, he presently pulled the pin from the back of the silver hot-water stand, and tipped the little kettle forwards.

The room looked very home-like and bright, unscented by sickly musk or patchouli, undraped by half-drawn curtains. The windows were wide open; the air full of September sunshine. Evelyn sitting there, tall and slender, with her bright hair twisted into a crown at the top of her head, looked almost girlish still.

John took a cup of tea and set it down untasted. "Evelyn," he said, forcing himself to speak quietly, "have you seen Gunn to-day. Did he give you his opinion about Aunt Catherine?"

"Yes," she said. "He thinks mamma will get quite strong again if she only follows his treatment, or rather the treatment of this doctor in Paris. He relieved my mind very much."

John stirred his tea with slow deliberation. "How long are you going to be away in Paris?"

She looked at him with an air of faint surprise. "Oh, a few weeks, I suppose. I hope we shall be home again before very long."

"I want to come too," he said, quietly. "I think Aunt Catherine would like it. I can get a room close by. I won't be in the way. I can join Solway later on."

"Are you anxious?" she asked, with a note of alarm in her voice. "Don't you believe in Gunn? He said twice over that he believed mamma would get quite strong if I could persuade her to follow his advice."

John might be a clumsy man sometimes. He was not clumsy here. "I believe in him implicitly," he said. "But I flatter myself that Aunt Catherine would miss my visits."

With an air of relief, she poured an unnecessary amount of cream into her own cup. "I am sure mamma would miss you very much, John. I suppose nothing would induce you to stay in the same house with us; because, if so, we might possibly invite you?"

John suddenly got up, and came to her side, possessed by an access of courage or desperation. "I never thought you would ask me, Evelyn."

"Is that a reasonable supposition? Is that why you and Laura have never invited me to stay at Godwin's Rest?"

Beneath the sunburn the colour rushed into his face. "If I had invited you, would you have come?"

She shook her head and smiled. "Isn't it rather too late to ask me?"

"Yes," he said, honestly, but with a great sadness in his voice, "I suppose it is. If it were all twenty years ago, if I were my old self, I would even now ask you to forgive me for being a fool. But now I know better. I have done you no injury, Evelyn—only myself. You know too well"—here he gathered himself together—"you know I believed, for twenty years, what I never really believed, that you were a coquette."

"Yes," she said, quite quietly, "I know that. But I never knew till to-day that you felt you had earned my contempt." Her head went up with a proud gesture. "The door was open. I couldn't help hearing. Have you made up your mind to believe that next, John?"

She left her seat, walked to the flower-stand, and began stripping the bloom from a geranium with ruthless fingers.

John came after her in a couple of strides. "Do you mean," he said, "that after all these years there could be anything else? Do you mean that I have not sinned past forgiveness?"

"I mean just that," she said, under her breath.

He laid a hand on her shoulder. Whatever may have been his faults, he was not a conceited man. "Do you mean," he said, "that after all my detestable behaviour you would be willing to marry me still?"

Despite her confusion, the ludicrous side of it all struck her irresistibly. Between tears and laughter, she turned upon him,

flushing like a girl. "I am not the queen, John. Can't you put it differently?"

"But there's no question about myself," he said, with swift earnestness. "I have wanted to marry you all my life."

She drew a little away from him, with a pretty rueful gesture. "You couldn't expect me to take it for granted."

"I think I had given up expecting anything," he said, in a low voice.

She came back to his side, and slipped her hand into his. "You were so dreadfully, horribly proud, John. What do you suppose Laura will say to us both?"

"Laura be hanged," he ejaculated. "But perhaps I am a prouder man than you think. And yet"—here his honesty as usual got the upper hand—"if I hadn't a penny in prospect, I believe something had got into me this afternoon which would have spoken. I believe I haven't a rag of proper pride left. I have even promised Aunt Catherine that I will take half the Godwin money. I find that my lack of means distresses her."

"There will be the rent for Godwin's Rest," she suggested.

He laughed. "In the meantime, will you give me a bit of your geranium?"

She handed it to him, suggesting that it was a better piece than the one he had stolen in the summer.

"What do you mean, Eve?"

"Why, that day I came over. I saw you wanted my button-hole. You were too proud to ask for it. Were you too proud to pick it up?"

"Yes," he owned, "I did that much, but only because I expected to hear next that your ponies had bolted."

"What other unkind statements were you making about me to mamma when I came in?" she asked him presently.

He looked down at her, suddenly grave. "I will go upstairs and retract them at once if you like."

"It's later than I thought. I will come with you," she said, a little shyly. "I want mamma to tell me about this new treatment. I do hope it won't be strict dieting or anything very tiresome. I do hope she will follow it."

John drew her hand through his arm. "I think Aunt Catherine will follow it," he said, with a note of sad assurance in his voice, "but I am afraid it will be—tiresome."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Two hours later the Comte de Brie shown into Mrs. Godwin's sitting-room, found her languidly looking through a pile of old letters. Heavily draped curtains shut out the bright sunlight. A bunch of tuberose scented the air with almost overpowering fragrance. At the far end of the room a musical box, beginning to run down, was playing an air from Ernani.

At the entrance of her visitor Mrs. Godwin left the writing-table and seated herself in a corner of the sofa.

"You find me," she said, "in the midst of packing. Really a move is a most exhausting business, even when the furniture remains behind. I am quite glad of a little rest."

"I must not take up too much of your time," he said, "but I knew you must be anxious to hear Sir William Gunn's report of Madame. I am glad to be able to say that it is a very hopeful one."

Mrs. Godwin picked up her vinaigrette. "I should like to have seen him myself. My attack has quite taken all my strength away. However, of course, that is a matter of secondary importance. And you say that Sir William made the best of poor Aunt Catherine?"

"More than the best he says; if she follows his advice there is no reason why she should not live to be ninety."

"She looks very ill to me," said Mrs. Godwin. Her voice trembled slightly. "He is probably buoying her up with false hopes."

"I think not," he said, a little startled at the suggestion. "He has won a reputation for plain speaking."

"But her heart, Armand? Besides she looks so very delicate."

"Gunn says her heart is absolutely sound. A little weak perhaps, but there is no disease about it. Madame is always pale. But she has a magnificent constitution. Gunn says so himself. She is off to Paris next week with Lady Evelyn, as you know, and I must soon be flitting too."

He spoke with that air of assurance which carries conviction. Mrs. Godwin sat listening to him with a curious feeling of numbness in her hand and head, an unusual buzzing in her ears.

The position in which she found herself strongly resembled the game played by children, called "Musical chairs." This summer she had been playing it continually, in an exciting fashion, with houses instead of furniture. With her own villa in prospect for the winter, Godwin's Rest before her in the spring, and the Grange in the near distance, she had allowed for plenty of camping ground. To find the number of desirable residences suddenly diminished to two instead of three, did not suit her fancy at all. Besides, when Evelyn turned out in the spring, Godwin's Rest, shorn of all hope of the Godwin money, and hampered by the thought of John's constant reminders as to bills, and his reduction of all outside expenses, would no longer be a desirable and coveted residence. To settle there again without a brougham, and with no orchid-house to show to friends, to go on with the smaller staff of servants, now easily enough accounted for by the prospect of her own speedy flitting: the whole future prospect set in a new light struck sudden dismay into her heart.

Godwin's Rest with the Godwin money attached to it would give her everything that she wanted in the way of luxury; without it—Mrs. Godwin shuddered inwardly at the bare idea; for John, no longer tractable as in former days, had been the cause of fictitious alarm more than once lately, and who could tell what piece of folly he might perpetrate next. Of course Sir William might be mistaken, but she knew him to be a very clever man. Very clever and very blunt. The Godwins as a family, celebrated for their fine constitu-

tions, seldom died of anything but accidents or extreme old age. And Sir William declared Aunt Catherine's heart to be quite sound. People had no business to pose as invalids, to look as if they had heart complaint when they were without one. At that moment Mrs. Godwin was conscious chiefly of a sense of virtuous indignation, of long-standing personal injury inflicted by her aunt's deceptive appearance. One thought after another, each one more confused than the last, ran swiftly through her head, while the Count continued talking in his pleasantly modulated voice.

"I am thinking of leaving in a day or two myself," he said presently. "My own plans are rather unsettled. Madame suffers from rheumatism in her right hand. If I don't return to Italy I may winter in Paris. She has begged me to resume my former post as secretary."

Unconsciously if he had calculated for ten years, he could not have made a more effective speech. Always jealous of her aunt's influence, jealous that Armand should this year have stayed at the Grange, instead of coming to Godwin's Rest, Mrs. Godwin felt at this moment intensely piqued that he could talk so calmly of spending the winter in Paris, of abandoning the villa without apparent compunction. A covetous dog buries an unused bone sooner than see some other neighbour take it away.

Her hand holding the vinaigrette trembled. She turned her head away, but not before Armand had seen the flash of rising anger in her brown eyes.

He left his chair and came deliberately to the sofa, sitting down at her side and possessing himself of one of the slender jewelled hands lying in her lap.

"Carissima," he said, "don't you know that my going depends entirely upon yourself? When once you have left Godwin's Rest I may as well go to Paris as anywhere else. You have but to say one word and I will go or stay as you bid me."

Mrs. Godwin made a faint ineffectual effort to draw her hand away. Possibly till this minute she had never fully realised how absolutely necessary to her comfort his presence had become during the last few months. The mere prospect of his settling in Paris filled her with a sense of unmeasured desolation.

The life of a Comtesse de Brie suddenly assumed many definite attractions. She had always stood rather in awe of her cousin, had always mentally been on her best behaviour in his presence. He treated her as she treated herself, as an infallible pope, and his manner while it flattered her *amour propre* set a most salutary curb on her temper.

This summer he had made himself necessary to the comfortable maintenance of her everyday life. She must always attach herself to someone, not necessarily from affection. John's personality for instance generally irritated her, but like a person seated in a country cart in an unsurveyed country, she could not even if the roughness of the conveyance galled her pride, do without outside assistance to pull her up the hills of life. Besides, Armand de Brie had always possessed a strange power over her, a power never abused,

and only temporarily overcome by young Godwin's headlong courtship, and by the secret allurements of great wealth. Put on a pedestal by her cousin she might come down habitually to a lower level in his absence, but the sound of his step always sent her back to the shrine ready for flowers and incense. Far better to be the goddess of a small temple than one of a crowd of unworshipped outsiders.

Armand's constant visits had been very pleasant ones. And life with John was not what it used to be. He had never treated her at her true value. Ted of course later on would make her a suitable allowance, but there could be no great state or splendour such as she had once planned to carry out, when mistress of the great Godwin fortune.

The angry speech which had risen to her lips died unuttered. "With a grown up daughter I am almost too old to talk of a second marriage," she said feebly. "I must have time to think, Armand. Such a matter cannot be decided in a hurry."

"I hoped you might have thought a little about it during the last few weeks," he said. "My time is running short. You are the only person I have ever wished to marry. I am an elderly man, Laura. If you send me away now, I shall never come back."

Mrs. Godwin hesitated. Henrietta as a possible Duchess of Harebrook: Sir William making a possible mistake: her own position as dowager mistress at the Grange, or as queen dowager at Godwin's Rest—all those possibilities mirage-like floated once more through her brain, while the man at her side sat patiently waiting.

"There is poor John," she said half under her breath. "I have had small inducement to do so, but I have always considered him before myself. He is quite lost without me. And he will come back here in the spring."

"I doubt if he will go away for more than a week or so," said the Count reflectively. "Madame and Lady Evelyn will be in Paris almost directly. I understand that Mr. Godwin will be of the party." His air of unmistakable meaning made Mrs. Godwin look up at him incredulously.

"My dear Armand, you are quite mistaken. They hate each other, those two. They are barely on speaking terms. He only goes to the Grange to see Aunt Catherine."

"I think not," he said gently. His manner to-day was strangely gentle. "This afternoon I met them both coming from the small boudoir, and Mr. Godwin asked me to congratulate him."

The musical box going slower and slower suddenly stopped in the middle of a tune. Mrs. Godwin at that moment saw as in a flash but one abiding place: saw too that the Count stood nearest to it, and feared herself to be left on the wrong side of the doorway. Even if invited to make her home at Godwin's Rest or at the Grange, she would sooner have lived with a couple of tame tigers of uncertain habits as with her Aunt Catherine or with Evelyn. As to the latter, she said to herself passionately, she would never be indebted to Evelyn for a sixpence.

Down before this last announcement went all her false expectations. In sight of shore, with every sail set, the fair galley of hope foundered

in deep water, and wittingly or unwittingly the Duchess had opened the sluice gates of destruction. Suddenly forlorn, she sat there like a lost and runaway child dreading the solitude in front of it, longing for the figure of its nurse to lead it home even to a dry-bread supper, shorn of splendour.

Struggling with a sense of desolation, of burning pride and hurt vanity: overcome with anger and mortification, small wonder if she turned and clung to Armand's hand as a drowning man grasps a plank.

For the first time in her life dangerously near fainting, she leant back against her cushions with a sound of rushing water in her ears and lips devoid of colour.

He did not ring for assistance, only applied eau de cologne deftly, passing light pitiful fingers over the low brow and thick hair. She might be a very faulty creature, but who can set a limit to the subtle sense of attraction between two people? She was still a beautiful woman, and he had never wished to make anyone else his wife. In his character there existed a good deal of persistence. Ask the keeper of any menagerie if his favourite captive is the one likely to give least trouble, and you are certain to receive a negative answer. Besides, as a philosopher and a student of human nature, De Brie had taken the measure of his fair companion long ago, and he honestly believed that she would be a happier woman in Sicily.

Recovering at the end of a few minutes, she began to sob hysterically. She had sacrificed her whole life to John, and now without scrupling to let Godwin's Rest he was marrying just to keep a roof over his head. She never spoke ill of anyone, only Armand was absolutely safe, the one stable nature in a most disappointing world. Her relations had proved themselves an ungrateful set. She felt utterly ill and shattered, by John's long course of deception. He had all the time hidden his real motive for going to the Grange. Armand had better leave her, and when did he think of starting for Paris? Whereupon he told her that he was not starting at all, and sitting still at her side unrebuked, drew such a picture of life at the Palazzo—where, as she knew well enough, her own income supplemented by outside addition would go twice as far as in England, might even command some splendour—described so well the old *dolce far niente* ways, talked of the beautiful garden, of the orange trees which she herself had planted, that she listened to him temporarily fascinated and passively acquiescent, drifting with the tide as most people drift who have battered themselves to exhaustion against the inevitable. For years she had seldom experienced such violent emotion, and it left her temporarily worn out. This evening he left Godwin's Rest, carrying with him the promise of a speedy marriage. He would start for Palermo next week. The house should be done up in the fashion she most affected. He knew her tastes well enough, and could be trusted to see to everything. She and Henrietta could go to San Rimini as they had planned, where they would be in Ted's villa. The marriage could take place abroad, and Solway himself might give her away; then Henrietta could stay with friends for a few weeks while the Comte and Comtesse de Brie travelled by leisurely

stages to Palermo. Once more another shake had been given to the kaleidoscope.

Henrietta's own wedding, Mrs. Godwin now decided, should take place later on in Sicily, not at San Rimini. On this particular point her mind was made up afresh. She felt no more anger with Armand than Noah could reasonably have felt with the ark. But she resented a private deluge all to herself most bitterly, for the simple reason that other people remained unaffected by it: in serene ownership of their most cherished possessions.

John and Evelyn coming in together later on, found the mistress of Godwin's Rest more than prepared to receive them.

"I wanted to come to see you," said Evelyn with a very womanly expression on her face, feeling kindly to-day to all the world, even prepared to be snubbed. "I mean I wanted to come myself to set your mind at rest about John."

"I am not going to Little Abbey after all," he chimed in, "I am off to Paris next week, Laura. Evelyn has at last consented to take me as well as the other encumbrances."

Mrs. Godwin had risen from her sofa by this time and shaken hands. These two women never kissed each other. Furiously angry with John she would have died sooner than betray to Evelyn the smallest feeling of surprise or of mortification. Standing there she looked very handsome. One hand held a priceless shawl round her sloping shoulders, the other played with a vinaigrette. Her words came evenly, unmarked by any hesitation.

"It is very good of you to be paying calls so late in the day. I offer you my best congratulations," she said, looking straight at Evelyn, and forcing a cold smile, "and I wish you, John, all the happiness that you deserve." Machiavelli himself could hardly have bettered this speech.

"You see my dear Laura," John went on with an almost guilty sense of happiness, "you have spoilt me for keeping house by myself, you see —"

"Oh yes, I see," she interrupted, turning to them both with a little air of patronage wonderfully well maintained—"I have seen a good deal. If you two people had only come to an understanding a little sooner, it would have been all the better for me. Now, I can abandon my long duty with a clear conscience. No one can say I left you John, till after you had formed new ties." Garibaldi himself could not have posed more heroically.

"I need no longer put other people's happiness before my own," she went on. "I suppose you will scarcely be surprised in your turn to learn, if you have not heard it already (here she insensibly relapsed into her native tongue) that the Comte de Brie counts himself a happy man in that I have consented to become his wife."

She did it very well: as the Duchess said afterwards when told of this interview; in her own particular line Laura would always remain without an equal.

Needless to say the call was not a lengthy one. John prudently escorted Evelyn back to the Grange and dined there. Laura's very calm manner he knew of old, as the mariner in Eastern seas learns

to recognise the complete hush found in the heart of a typhoon, and prepares rapidly for impending destruction.

John might spend the evening with Evelyn, but on his return home he scarcely felt surprised to hear that Mrs. Godwin for the first time in her life had sat up for him.

On his entrance she laid her book aside, her anger smouldering at white heat during the past hour or two broke out now unrestrained.

"So," she said slowly, "you have come back. I suppose you are marrying Evelyn to keep a roof over your head. Where is your pride, John?"

Far from being abashed, he threw back his head and laughed. "There's not a rag of it left, Laura."

"Unless by special arrangement you won't get any rent," she went on cuttingly.

"Never a bit," he rejoined still smiling. "Oddly enough, you and I are both much in the same position so far as our rents are concerned. I must congratulate you on your own future prospects. De Brie is a good fellow."

Mrs Godwin flashed angrily. For the first time it occurred to her that she would of course receive no rent for her villa. Still she did not blame Armand. She said to herself that he had proved true and staunch when all other support seemed likely to vanish.

"Fortunately he is to be relied upon," she retorted icily. John's determined good temper serving only as fuel to feed the fire of her anger—"he at least has always treated me with proper consideration."

John's manner changed instantly. "My dear Laura," he said kindly, "I am very sorry if I have seemed forgetful of your comfort. Believe me, you shall lose nothing by my marriage. I shall not allow this Brush Light failure to make any difference to your income." He never used the word allowance. "You will be in receipt before long of not less than eight hundred a year, when once my own affairs are a little more settled."

Always a generous man, he could not forget that Laura was his brother's widow: that she had been mistress of his house for many years. Strained though his innate sense of courtesy might be, by her long course of extravagance, he could not allow her to settle elsewhere on a diminished income. Even this unexpected offer failed to produce a truce.

"You seem strangely richer than you told me you were last week," she said. "I will never touch a penny of Evelyn's money."

"Neither should I ask you to," said John coldly, for the first time this evening looking thoroughly put out and uncomfortable. He had spoken impulsively, and could not explain his own words, the Duchess having particularly begged him to say nothing about his future prospects.

"Time enough to do that next week," she suggested with grim humour, "if you get the whole of the Godwin money instead of the half of it."

Satisfied at last to have put him out of countenance, and determined neither to decline nor accept an offer sure to be carried into effect,

Mrs. Godwin left her sofa, ungenerously certain that none of her remarks would be repeated to Evelyn.

John bit his lips; self restraint often heavily handicaps an honourably minded man or woman.

"Although you have no explanation to offer, I am glad you are still so much better off than you gave me to understand," she said. "I have never liked Evelyn, I never shall, I think both you and she have failed to show me the smallest consideration. I could have given an answer to poor Armand weeks ago if you had been a little more explicit. Till to-day you have always led me to understand that you went to the Grange to see Aunt Catherine. Anyone lacking in penetration might have been completely deceived. As it is I can only be thankful that I have nothing to reproach myself with."

Picking up her book she left the room, while John went to bed divided between vexation and amusement.

As Ted's guest he knew that his sister-in-law would be well, even luxuriously, cared for. As Armand's wife she would once more voluntarily reside abroad. The future Comtesse de Brie by her own act had virtually cut herself off from life at Godwin's Rest. But if need be John would cheerfully have parted with half his income, if by so doing he could have insured his sister-in-law's absence.

Henrietta took the news of the engagement very quietly. The prospect of the Count as a stepfather did not displease her, and she made an excellent and sympathetic listener on the rare occasions when her mother came to sit upstairs.

CHAPTER XXX.

BEFORE John, Mrs. Godwin posed as a martyr till the end of the week, when he left for Paris in company with his aunt and cousin. On the same day Armand de Brie started for Palermo, having definitely fixed the date of the wedding for the fifth of November, at San Rimini.

At this time of the year, the Grange was occupied by Solway's cousin, George Clifford, who always took over the shooting. Ted had no great liking for Mrs. Clifford, a woman who carried a gun, smoked cigarettes, and cared only for dogs and horses. His duties as host once fulfilled, he spent a part of each day at Godwin's Rest, till a peremptory telegram summoned him to Paris.

There he found his stepmother very ill; indeed not expected to live. But within a few hours of his arrival, she rallied again, saw him for a few minutes, and peremptorily forbade all mention of her illness to anyone in England. He remained in Paris for two nights, by which time the doctors, satisfied at last, declared their patient not only out of danger, but on the way to recovery.

On receipt of this information, Ted returned home at once. On his next visit to Godwin's Rest, Mrs. Godwin asked him a good many questions without eliciting much information. As she expressed it,

he seemed pre-occupied, over-anxious about Henrietta, whose condition calling for no real anxiety, yet seemed likely to necessitate a temporary postponement of the journey abroad. She had taken a fresh cold, and was obliged to stay in bed. Though never seriously ill, another fortnight went by before Dr. Clifford once more promoted her to the sofa.

While she was still upstairs, Ted went back to Paris for two days, in order to be present at his sister's wedding. The marriage, after a month's engagement, could scarcely be called a hurried one. Moreover, the Duchess had set her heart upon its taking place without further delay, and at the present time no one liked to cross her wishes. John, indeed, required no persuasion, whilst Evelyn's consent after some demur was won, when an old friend of her stepmother's offered to stay in the house for an indefinite period.

Nothing could have induced Mrs. Godwin to be present at the wedding. She excused herself on the plea of delicate health, and Henrietta's unexpected indisposition. She also sent Evelyn a handsome wedding present, for which, many months afterwards, John received the bill.

Henrietta, warned by the cloud on her mother's brow, soon gave up discussing her uncle's movements. On the day of Ted's return, her spirits were greatly cheered by a long letter from Paul. He sent a capital account of the wedding; said he liked his work, which kept him very busy. He had not yet begun to re-write his play, as he still hoped it might be traced. He had met several very interesting people, and was going more into society.

Mrs. Godwin coming in after luncheon, with her usual question, "Aren't you better, my dear?" was agreeably surprised by an affirmative answer.

"Yes, mamma, I am very much better; I think I shall come down this afternoon."

"Ted is here already," said her mother. "He has brought you some lovely flowers and all sorts of things from Paris. Very proper and lover-like of course, but I think love is apt to make people a little selfish. I was telling him what terrible palpitations I have been having, and he scarcely seemed to be properly concerned. You had better come down soon if you are ready; that white dress is very becoming; and Sophie can take your pillow and shawl to the boudoir."

Thus adjured, Henrietta rose at once, but Ted must have had sharp ears, for he met the little procession at the foot of the stairs, Henrietta found herself put upon the boudoir sofa with skilful rapidity, where an enquiry followed as to her fitness to be up.

"Doctor Clifford gave me leave this morning—I asked him," she said rather shyly, but feeling the next minute that she had no need to be worried about anything.

He settled her pillows with understanding fingers, drew out a light screen to keep a draught away, and then sat down at her side with an air of quiet content more convincing than half a dozen effusive speeches. He had drawn his own conclusions during the last few weeks. While keeping Mrs. Godwin well entertained; he knew that

she was no nurse, knew it long before he saw the nervous glance, the slight start which Henrietta gave when her mother brushed by the sofa. Mrs. Godwin's temper generally served as a barometer to the rest of the household. To-day she wore a slightly injured air, finding herself treated for once as a person of secondary importance. She evinced not the smallest interest in Ted's account of the wedding, only suggesting that the whole affair must have been very hurried and uncomfortable.

"Considering all things, it can scarcely be called that," said Ted, smiling; "besides, my mother had set her heart upon it. She seemed to be afraid of something happening."

"I can't imagine why," said Mrs. Godwin, languidly. "Is Aunt Catherine pretty well?"

Ted seated by the fire, took up the poker and began to break an obstinate lump of coal.

"My mother is looking wonderfully well; Gunn's advice and this new treatment for rheumatism are suiting her admirably. She looks ten years younger already, Evelyn says."

Mrs. Godwin with difficulty suppressed a sarcastic remark about Evelyn's little exaggerations. She had no wish to quarrel with Ted, but she said to herself that John might marry anyone he liked, and that her aunt might cry wolf once a year for the future. Metaphorically, she had washed her hands of her relations during the last few weeks.

"Evelyn scarcely gave me time to send her a wedding present," she remarked in an indifferent voice. "I have written my congratulations. I suppose Aunt Catherine is likely to keep well?"

"I see no reason why she should not," said Ted, imperturbably. "A very old friend, Madame de Lavaine, is staying with her for the next few weeks, so that Evelyn and John have gone away quite happily. But you'll have heard from him yourself."

"Oh, yes, he has written, but his hieroglyphics are as bad as a puzzle to make out," she answered impatiently, not choosing to say that she had devoured every word of the letter, in order to understand clearly the amount of income now definitely placed at her disposal. "He and Evelyn seem to be in no hurry to come back here. We ought to have been abroad ourselves by this time; I am feeling sadly in need of change. I have been unable to get to Henrietta's room lately more than once a day on account of the stairs. Doctor Clifford saw that they would be quite too much for me; lonely days make one's anxiety all the greater. And here we are, nearly at the end of September, and I have promised Armand to be ready for him by the fifth of November. It seems to me, that in this world, one only makes plans to have them upset."

"I shall be quite well enough to start in a day or two," said Henrietta, colouring.

"There is not the smallest hurry; John and Evelyn were saying to me, only yesterday, that they hoped we should stay on here as long as ever we wanted to," said Ted, wisely identifying his own movements with those of his hostess.

"Nothing could induce me to stay here after the first of October,"

she rejoined, with dignity. "I understand John means to have this house done up most beautifully. So of course he wants us out of the way."

Henrietta lay very quietly on the sofa while this discussion went on, apparently busying herself with spreading out a great bunch of flowers on a table close to her elbow.

Ted turned to her now, saying, "I suppose you know that your mother and I have been thinking about your journey. I want you both to come and stay with me at San Rimini, as soon as Doctor Clifford thinks you can travel. Will you come, Hetty?"

"Yes," said her mother for her, "we will certainly come, and then this house can be left to the work-people."

But Ted still looked at Henrietta, and his expression brought a sudden colour into her face.

"Oh, yes, I will come," she said under her breath, noting the gathering clouds on her mother's brow. "See, Ted, will you have one of your own flowers as a buttonhole?"

He took the flower and the hand together. "You know," he said, "I have a villa at San Rimini, and it won't be like hotel life. We can travel slowly, but not until you are fit to start."

"I shall be fit. I suppose we couldn't go by sea?" said Henrietta, looking at him with an instinctive sense of being understood.

"By sea to Genoa, quite well, if you prefer it, Hetty."

"Really, my dear Henrietta," Mrs. Godwin struck in, "you do have the most impossible ideas."

"We might all go as far as Genoa with Solway," Ted interrupted, diplomatically. "He is in Paris this week, but the 'Clytie' is off Calais, and Solway will soon be going south. He will be only too pleased to make himself useful."

(To be continued.)
